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READING AND RESPONSIBILITY: THE GRAMMAR OF THE INEXPRESSIBLE
AND THE POIESIS OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint Ph.D.

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Philip G. Banning

June 2010

Advisor: Dr. Francis Seeburger

Author: Philip G. Banning
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ABSTRACT

Reading religious literature is generally considered to be either an “outsider’s” practice useful for the determination of a culture’s or individual reader’s beliefs, whether of the past or present, or an “insider’s” practice necessary for guidance in morality and “right” action. Both of these practices mean the text is construed as the motivation or cause of other beliefs and actions, and that the purpose or value of such texts is nothing more than identifying and promulgating certain beliefs. Understanding texts and reading in this way does not allow us to conceive of the text as a work of art and perceive the reader’s own self-structuring through engaging this art. An alternative notion of reading can help us to conceive of the self as a work of art whose growth depends on encountering and engaging another’s artistry, in this case, the religious text. Through the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, and to a lesser degree that of Jean-Paul Sartre, this dissertation proposes reading itself to be an imaginative process that illuminates the self and its relationship with others. As part of that imaginative activity, the concepts of truth and the self are also re-thought and dislocated from the subject-object framework which dominates much of contemporary thinking. The practice of reading is therefore best seen not as a search for truths or beliefs “embedded” in the text, but a communication with others that proves the self to be in a constant state of becoming, an artistic process most human in its resistance to perfectability.

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Introduction

One reads in order to ask questions.
Franz Kafka

I. Thesis and Scope

Prior to encountering a text, a reader already has an understanding of what it is to read, one which contains an implicit philosophy of language. Readers often simply take reading as primarily, if not entirely, a matter of “information” processing, then assume that a text, insofar as they consider whatever information it contains to be “factual” or “accurate,” determines in a causative manner their beliefs and the actions subsequently informed by those beliefs. Much of twentieth-century philosophy, however, rejects and critiques the propositional theory of language that supports such a model of reading. The following dissertation will use this critique to advance a different understanding of reading, one whereby we realize reading offers us the possibility to forge a different self. Through such activity, reading shows itself to be a dialogic, creative process originating in the linguistic imagination and involving both author and reader, a process resulting in the beliefs the reader forms to relieve the critical need to interpret the text, to address the question of who the reader is in the world the text reveals.

Developing this thesis further, I can claim that reading as such a creative process is an engagement with another human being (or beings) through that person’s (or persons’) own imaginative construction of what it means to exist, that is, her

interpretation of being. In general, this construction takes the form of spoken discourse, but for purposes of my thesis, I focus on that imaginative structure known as text (see below for further clarifications of “text” and “discourse”). Reading can then be considered the interpretation of interpretation, that is, the reader’s activity of building or creating (*poiesis*: a making, a forming) a meaning from the author’s¹ own created edifice of meaning that is the text. So conceived, reading can no longer be simply understood as an interaction with an artifact (printed material, the book, scroll, etc.), but must instead be conceived as an intersubjective and, I will argue, “transsubjective” practice that precludes us both from casually “reading off” the meaning of the text as if others (the authors) were simply not there and from awaiting meaning from the text as if we as readers were simply processors of language, not interpreters of it. Reading conceived as this genuine encounter with another is a kind of communicating, an explicit being-with-others that requires attention and care, and is therefore an interpretative, imaginative, artistic practice, neither the end-product of a strict adherence to rules and procedures of interpretation that pre-determine our reading (though we often explain our reading of a text by appealing to interpretative rules) nor a haphazard, self-willed process of imputing meaning to a text.

This artistic practice that I argue reading is builds meaning(s) through engaging the text, meanings that can also be understood as what the reader “believes” the text to be

¹Although I will often use the singular “author” throughout this dissertation to keep the grammar from becoming unwieldy, what I say also applies to texts with multiple authors like the book of Genesis, or texts that are compilations of texts but considered by some to be unified, like the Bible. That texts are imaginative human constructions is what I am emphasizing through my use of the term “author.”

“saying,” in other words, believing and interpreting begin to overlap. None too surprising, in the case of a sacred text, these meanings can become the very religious beliefs the reader holds. Such beliefs, which are unique to the individual reader, are her response to the text and therefore her responsibility, a responsibility which is enacted when beliefs are shared. The architecture of such meaning-creation, a creation assuredly not *ex nihilo*, is best conceived as a symbiosis with the author(s), a poesis that depends on what this other (the author) expresses as her text, not on what we alone as readers think, express, or feel. I will argue that the meaning of the text for the reader is therefore grounded on what is *not* expressible by her (for if it were so, she would be the author), an inexpressibility that from the reader’s perspective can also be illustrated as a void of meaning, a meaninglessness, that is, as meanings that do not exist for her because they lie beyond her horizon until she engages another (viz., the author or authors) in that practice we call “reading.”

II. Context and Comparison with Similar Concepts of Reading

I am by no means the first person to understand that reading is or at least can be a transformative practice. David Tracy, for example, believes that what he calls “religious classics” are best understood as a “conversational game,” one in which the reader gives up a strong notion of self (the modern subject or ego) in order to play the game of conversation properly.² Authentic conversation, as Tracy understands it, demands the

²See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 102: “When the text is a classic, I am also recognizing that its ‘excess of meaning’ both demands constant interpretation and bears a certain kind of timelessness—namely the timeliness of a classic expression radically rooted in its own historical time and calling to my own historicity. [...] If the text is a genuinely classic one, my present horizon of understanding should always be provoked, challenged, transformed.” And again David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San

communicants listen to one another and be open to the other's "manifestation" of truth, thereby risking the self in the possibility of being transformed by, in this case, the text. In other words, authentic conversation risks the possibility of conversion through communication. For Tracy, this risk-taking reading practice leads to an authentic form of tolerance, for it requires letting others speak and hearing them on their own terms. He argues that this kind of tolerance still leaves open the possibility of a critical engagement in the form of non-violent or non-repressive argument, i.e., argument that is itself "conversational" in that the conversation partners build their argument together.

I find Tracy's goals laudable, and I agree with and will indeed echo much that he has to say regarding the power of reading and the nature of texts.³ However, much of what he says leads to implications that I find philosophically problematic. In addition, Tracy seems to think that his own avowed Roman Catholicism does not inhibit or alter his interpretation of other "religious classics" from other faiths, a point I will return to

Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 12: "classics are those texts that bear an excess and permanence of meaning, yet always resist definitive interpretation." Regarding games, Tracy says that "in entering into an experience of a genuine work of art we risk entering a 'game' where truth is at stake: the truth of the recognition of our actuality and possibility." See Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 113. Tracy considers the game to be a "release from self-consciousness," and that in "conversing" with the text, we not only come to new understandings, but an understanding of the limitations of this "self-consciousness" and the prejudices it carries with it. See David Tracy, "Theological Method," in *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 41-3.

³For example: "Interpretation is inevitably creative. The meaning of the text does not lie 'behind' it (in the mind of the author, the original social setting, the original audience) nor even 'in' the text itself. Rather the meaning of the text lies in front of the text—in the now common question, the now common subject matter, of both text and interpreter." "It is not the case that we attempt simply to lose ourselves in the 'autonomy' of the text. Rather we attempt to primarily gain ourselves by losing ourselves in the logic of questioning the subject matter disclosed by the text." And finally: "We...recognize both the creativity and the inevitable finitude and historicity of even our best acts of interpretation...[W]e live...with the liberating insight that *insofar as we understand at all we understand differently—differently, that is, from the original author*" (original italics). See Tracy, "Theological Method," 42-3.

later. I believe the source of these problems is in the head-on collision between Tracy's theological commitments and his manifest knowledge and use of certain philosophers and philosophical movements. Briefly put, he does not heed that distinction between philosophy and theology Heidegger–whom I follow on this point–describes in detail, and so his overall view of how we form meaning from the reading of sacred texts is, despite its importance and value, flawed and incomplete.

I approach the reading of texts in general, and sacred texts in particular, differently from Tracy by maintaining that distance between philosophy and theology that Heidegger discusses, but without the latter's focus on Christian theology alone. Following Heidegger, I think it can be easily demonstrated that theological and religious precepts presuppose the disclosure of beings as already able to be fully conceptualized according to a distinct and consistent system, i.e., beings are theorized according to predefined notions of existence and a concomitant interpretation of that existence as if produced by the particular system at hand. Philosophy, on the other hand, as Heidegger practices it, attempts to formulate its concepts by keeping Being "itself" in view, that which forms the ground of and enables interpretations of that grounding. Tracy's plea for tolerance of systems of belief not his own (Roman Catholic), based on seeing others' texts as equally transformative as the Christian Bible—a position for which I have great sympathy—arises from within the structure of his particular interpretation of Christian theology (itself a totalizing view of all beings that transcends finitude), whereas the plea for tolerance implicit in my own understanding of reading comes from within the practice of reading itself, regardless of the provenance of the text in question.

Tracy himself illustrates Heidegger's claims about theology and theologians' reading practices by consistently characterizing the religious classic as revealing "the whole by the power of the whole."⁴ Whereas I agree that sacred texts do indeed assume a position of authority, I think they do this by *imagining* wholeness. In contrast, Tracy is constrained by his own theological commitments to *assume* that this wholeness *already is*, that it exists above and beyond any simple notion of universe or "the all," and that all religions and their classics are, if read charitably, discussing or referring to the same thing, just from differing perspectives. I will claim instead that the sacred text is precious and a work of art because it is an interpretative engagement with existence that *imagines* and *structures* a whole (i.e., *forms* a wholeness from existence), an edifice of the imagination in which we as readers can find a place and by forming beliefs question ourselves, regardless of whether we agree or disagree with the "accuracy" as it were of that edifice. The literary work of art, and the sacred text in particular, offers us our "ownmost" possibility, as Heidegger might say, and calls to us as something needing interpretation, in the sense of a systematic explanation of the self in the process of becoming. Tracy, on the other hand, seems compelled by his own religious beliefs to accept the reality of the wholeness he refers to as something external, and so believes that existence is best understood holistically, the very description that Heidegger gives to metaphysics and why he claims metaphysics is "ontotheological."

⁴Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, 163. See also 155, 157-9, and 177.

The notion of tolerance leads to another way my view of reading, with special regard to sacred texts, is primarily different from views such as Tracy's, although I fully support his desire for "real" tolerance against what he calls "a simple affirmation of pluralism [that] can mask a repressive tolerance where all is allowed because finally nothing is taken seriously."⁵ He often seems to consider reading transformative from within and across traditions, i.e., we are admonished as readers to respect the history and depth of thought within separate traditions in order to understand how those traditions gather or "convert" followers or "believers." The staunch atheist or secularist, however, is not often moved by such arguments since she considers all religions and their texts (if they exist) equally invalid (in that she considers them as a group an entirely false or largely erroneous picture of "reality"), or at best separate cultural products deserving of only preservation and scientific study.⁶ Put another way, Tracy does not sufficiently mark the difference between his earlier notion of conversion (transformation of self) and this more traditional notion of "changing one's religion," which closes the door to further transformation. My view, however, is that reading any and all religious texts can be, and perhaps even should be, transformative, but not because of the particular "power" of a text to convert a reader to its particular worldview (that is, a system of beliefs organized into a coherent whole, a doctrine or dogma) and thereby have that reader grant it authority to dictate a theoretical view of existence, but instead because the sacred text as a work of

⁵Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, xi.

⁶Ibid., 172. Here, Tracy seems to imply that playing the conversation game with the text means all legitimate readings of a text will take the form of revelation. But isn't revelation a particular kind of interpretation? Just because I disagree with a text's holistic view, or with holistic views in general, does not mean I cannot be or never am transformed by reading the text.

art makes a particular interpretation of existence explicit and apparent, with which a reader can “compare” herself and open up new possibilities of being (as Tracy would agree), *regardless* of whether she, during or after reading, agrees or disagrees with the interpretation in question. Understood in such a way, reading would show itself to be a transformative practice irrespective of the particular perspective or “faith” of the reader (either before or after reading), and the sacred text could take its rightful place alongside the “classics” of fiction, poetry, philosophy, etc.

To summarize, reading the literary work of art, specifically the religious text, is an engagement with another or others that offers us the possibility of real transformation, but not solely according to its own explicit beliefs. In disagreeing with a text, we can still come to a poiesis of beliefs and therefore self. For this to occur authentically means to understand that the self is never finished or perfected, but always becoming, which realization requires always leaving open the possibility of re-reading the text, of yet further transformations through such re-reading. This power of the literary work of art, the imaginative construct of others, to help us realize ourselves and our possibilities requires constant engagement with and respect for those others, for ourselves, and for our own creativity, the real tolerance Tracy is hoping for.

III. Who Is the Reader of the Sacred Text?

Returning then to the importance of my thesis for sacred texts, the practice of reading a text, as well as the practice of forming beliefs based on one’s reading, leads us

to the question, “Who is the reader?”⁷ Answering that question becomes an unavoidable task in any reconceptualization of reading, for all understanding of reading depends on an understanding of this “who.” Is the reader one person or many? Is the reader a material substance, a body? Is the reader an amalgamation and crossroads of traditions and values? From a (post)modern point of view, it is all too easy to consider the reader merely a personality, to identify her with subjectivity. As a beginning to this study of the hermeneutics of reading—how we understand the situation of reader, author, and text—I offer here a perhaps radical starting point: reading is not undertaken by a person understood as an ego or subjectivity, but involves the very creation of person and a recognition that the human being is always in the process of becoming. We must take the question of who the reader is as one without a final answer, one that denies all totalization, and rather casts us into aporia. Reading always offers us this question, this crisis of self that demands, even if only temporarily, some response. All that can be said in general of the self is that it is always becoming, always in a state of generation or deconstruction, of discovery and creation. In the reader’s response to the call from the text, a poiesis of self is enacted through a poiesis of meaning, the latter often expressed

⁷As has become evident, much of my own work is based on an understanding of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy. The notion of “the who” here (*das Wer*) cannot be overemphasized. At the beginning of *Being and Time*, Heidegger asserts that “any entity is either a “*who*” (existence) or a “*what*” (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense)” (71). It is clear that human beings (Dasein) are “whos,” and so the question “Who is the reader?” cuts to the very heart of what it means to be human. The investigation of “the who” echoes throughout *Being and Time*, especially section 25 of I.4: “All the structures of Being which belong to Dasein, together with the phenomenon which provides the answer to this question of the ‘who’, are ways of its Being” (149). “The ‘who’ is what maintains itself as something identical throughout changes in its Experiences and ways of behavior, and which relates itself to this changing multiplicity in so doing. [...] It could be that the ‘who’ of everyday Dasein just is *not* the ‘I myself’” (150). But the question returns in part II: “For the most part *I myself* am not the ‘who’ of Dasein; the they-self is its ‘who’” (312). I will return to this inauthentic self below.

through the reader's formation of certain beliefs or a worldview (the latter considered here to be a holistic representation of all beings such that the question of Being is no longer asked but presumed answered through the assertion or assumption of a center or commonality to which all beings conform and by which their worth is calculated) thought to be "based" in the text. But to understand that the self of the reader—who the reader is—is always in question, is always becoming, is to understand that the poiesis of meaning is not the result of a self-contained and stable subject facing a self-contained object (the text), to understand that beliefs are in no way "caused" by the text. Rather, the text is given as the discourse (the artwork) of another, and in encountering this discourse with the desire to create meaning from what she herself does not and cannot express, the reader imagines (through inventing a new possibility of being) and thereby discovers a self.

But such imagining as the reader undertakes does not lead to some easy and facile form of truth encapsulated in some one putative "correct" interpretation of the given text (although legitimate and illegitimate readings remain).⁸ This dissertation affirms only that the reader *is able to* respond (response-ability), and recognizes that such response can remain a turning away from the call of the text. Such turning away can be violent, resulting in the burning or censorship of books as surrogate murder of others, or it can

⁸For examples of how a reading can on my view become illegitimate, see note 37 in chapter 4. In addition to immature readers and undeveloped reading practices, illegitimate readings can occur through imposing the self in the form of prejudices and beliefs ("values") onto the text, the reader in effect looking for her own reflection within the text. The reader either distorts the text in this case, or perhaps even discards it if the reflection cannot be found. This does not mean, however, that such a reader is somehow illiterate or unable to identify correctly plot structures, narrative themes, literary devices, etc. See also the following note.

give itself the illusion of a genuine hearing by claiming that the reader's beliefs are not imputed to the text but are inherent in it, that the text itself affirms the reader's worldview (the systematic, holistic structuring of her beliefs). But this kind of inauthentic⁹ reading is only one more path to the destruction of the text through its assertion that the text's meaning, and therefore the reader's understanding of self, text, and their interrelationship, can be reduced to one and only one interpretation, an orthodoxy expressed through whatever terms the reader's worldview assumes. The inauthentic reader is an inauthentic self, attempting to speak for the text (to understand another's existence by usurping that other's place, when her finitude implies she can only interpret her own existence), to claim that every voice is really a shadow of her own. Regardless of whether such a reader appeals to individuality or communal traditions, her reading is an attempt to maintain that her existence alone is real and to remain skeptical of the humanity of others (what Wittgenstein might call "solipsism"). This reader does indeed embrace her self, but only in terms of subjectivity, of ego, as her response to the call of the text, and in so doing reduces the rest of the world (including herself) to mere objects whose importance is in their mechanization for utilitarian ends.¹⁰ Such thinking elevates the epistemological to

⁹"Inauthentic" is used here and throughout in Heidegger's sense, briefly put, the reader who only sees others and self in the mode of things to be used or otherwise objectified, not realizing that the essence of being human is not as a thing, but an unfolding revelation of truth that brings us near to Being. The inauthentic reader can therefore be absolutely "correct" in her analysis of a text with regard to, e.g., plot structure, linguistic devices, etc., and in no way implies a person who is unable to grasp the nuances of language or only thinks she is reading when she is not. In fact, inauthenticity presupposes a grasp of language, for Dasein is never able not to "have" language, or choose not to understand (interpret) its existence.

¹⁰It is in this way that such a reader responds to the question, "Who is the reader?" In Heidegger's terms, this reader has accepted the "givenness of the I" and made it equivalent to the authentic Self, i.e., this reader can only understand her Self as "the they," a subject along with its attributes: "*Proximally*, it [Dasein] is not "I," in the sense of my own Self, that "am," but rather the Others, whose way is that of the "they" (*Being and Time*, 167). See also 151-3 and 312, as well as chapter 3 below.

the status of the ontological, where knowing the “correct” assignation of properties to objects understood only as substances of some kind becomes the definition of truth. To read inauthentically is then to turn away from mystery, to see oneself as the repository of truth, by becoming the One who decodes all meaning and dispenses with language.

As a final note regarding sacred texts, I should point out that a clear understanding of reading as self-poiesis relieves us of any need to rely on theories of “metaphor” in order to understand the language of said texts.¹¹ For those who do hold to such theories, such as Marcus Borg, metaphorical language is in continuous tension with literal language.¹² This is of course an ancient strategy, one exemplified by Augustine in *De Genesi ad Litteram*, where the reader feels the need to preserve the “historical” or “actual” along with any doctrinal sense the language could be said to contain. So according to Augustine and readers like him, the “literal” meaning of the text that opens

¹¹Such theories are legion, but the following will serve as brief examples. Stephen Need argues that language is “double” when God is the subject of discussion, and clearly assumes that the nature of language is metaphorical. He thinks that adhering to a “meaning is use” paradigm will “undermine” the “objective” focus of theological language, namely God. He associates language with embodiment and limits (what is not God), so metaphor becomes necessary in order to “discover” things about God through its “subversive” and “oblique” qualities. See Stephen W. Need, “Language, Metaphor, and Chalcedon: A Case of Theological Double Vision,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 2 (1995): 238, 240-42, and 253. Paul Ricoeur believes metaphors “provide untranslatable information” and so “yield some true insight about reality” (143). He defines literal meaning as “the common or usual lexical values of our words,” while metaphors have “immanent” images that are “semantic,” bringing what is far near to us. Incidentally, he has a Kantian theory of the imagination. See Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphoric Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 143 and 146-7. Louis Roy, a Dominican priest and scholar, argues that “it is important to appreciate the indispensable role of metaphorical language, which facilitates understanding, and at the same time to acknowledge its capacity to mislead us if we fall captive to imaginary representations.” See Louis Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 27. All three of these thinkers divide language from world, assume language should be primarily descriptive, and yet also reveal a deep distrust of language. I seek to overturn such notions of language and text throughout this dissertation.

¹²Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 69.

the book of Genesis is that the world was really created within six days, but perhaps more important, the number six is also thought to have some “divine” significance that adds meaning to the text and teaches a deeper truth. Language seems then inherently a kind of double-talk, with words and sentences having both a “deep” and a “shallow” meaning regardless of their particular context, and metaphors acting as a kind of tool to uncover these “hidden” deep meanings. Metaphorical theories of language almost always assert or imply that the primary and therefore most genuine and important use of language is physical description or “literalness,” with metaphors acting as abstractions that accompany the “main” meaning, or even as “subversive” elements within language. In other words, such theories maintain that metaphors clearly present themselves, i.e., that one can easily identify the “literal” meaning prior to any act of interpretation. Consequently, these theories of language must assume that reality is primarily a (material or spiritual) substance in order to have something on which metaphors can “build.” Borg, for example, reserves metaphorical meaning for doctrine, that which he considers to be extra-temporal and therefore valid in every context, whereas literal meaning he considers to be the given historical narrative that supplies the basis for his extraction of doctrine. Put another way, one can see that metaphorical interpretation is precisely how one extracts beliefs or worldviews from the text in order to make them the text’s “meaning,” its worth to readers.

Considered as a work of art, however, the sacred text offers us an encounter with another or others and a way to deconstruct the self and whatever beliefs the self holds. We thereby save such texts from reduction to mere dogma, to doctrines or laws in

propositional form, to just an authoritarian voice (all of which may indeed be present in or presented by the text), and save ourselves from claiming the sacred text is the “cause” of our beliefs based on whatever authority it claims to have. In fact, reading the sacred text as a work of art forces us to rethink the notion of belief and conclude that religious belief is an aspect of self in motion, not a finality reducible to propositions. Understood non-propositionally, beliefs are imaginative, creative states brought about through contact with another’s creativity (the text), and can always serve as their own critique, avoiding the issue of causality and the concomitant fossilization of belief as unchanging rule, doctrine, or law. The text, now heard authentically, can become alive, transforming itself as we awaken to our own process of becoming, and it no longer masquerades as a mere list of propositions that putatively describe reality removed from all context, all change, as a single object outside time, Being, and the hermeneutical circle. It is no longer the unchanging voice of an ultimate being at the peak of a hierarchy of beings (which assumes that Being is a being), and so we avoid the ontotheological reading of sacred texts (which, incidentally, is not what even the monotheistic believer is pursuing in the reading of her sacred text, although the dogmatic or literal reader may remain unclear on this issue). Nor is the text simply the “product” of a community, a narrative map of cultural psychology imbued with unconscious desires for survival that can only take symbolic form. Far from “secularizing” such texts, authentic reading imbues them with

sacrality by questioning them through a desire to create meaning, adhering to Heidegger's claim that "questioning is the piety of thought."¹³

Within the framework of the preceding larger philosophical considerations, my thesis can be summarized as follows. Reading a text authentically is an artistic practice that is itself a response to another work of art, namely, the text. Approaching this practice with the creativity it calls for allows readers to uncover not only their own assumptions regarding language, but also to question their understanding of self and identity—of just who they are. In holding themselves in question, readers become aware of their immersion in the whole human fabric, a fabric made visible as it were through reading and interpreting the text. Such awareness makes it possible to discard a mechanistic view of beliefs as somehow being directly drawn from the text, allowing the reader to become responsible for her own interpretation. Finally, reading viewed as a creative and dialogic process permits readers to imagine a new, unfinished self, one which each new text or rereading helps reshape.

IV. Background and Terms Used

The preceding paragraphs themselves, however, raise the question of how I am myself using such terms as "text," "reading," "discourse," etc. I will reiterate the "definitions" of these terms repeatedly throughout the dissertation in an effort to maintain consistency and readability, but here let me briefly introduce how I use some of the ones most central for this dissertation.

¹³Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), 35.

The term “text” is commonly used as a synonym for “book,” that is, the printed material itself or artifact, e.g., a classroom “textbook.” “Text” can also be used to refer to any printed matter, such as auto manuals, cookbooks, newspapers, but also such things as novels, plays, and various forms of literature. This usage leads to such locutions as “a line of text,” which then can include not only printed material like sentences, phrases, and fragments, but the meaning of which can be expanded also to include anything linguistic, so that spoken language too comes to be considered “textual.” So, for example, the line “‘Ouch!’ he cried,” is itself a line of text, but so is “Ouch!” shouted aloud as I pound my thumb with a hammer. In using the term “text” in expressions such as “sacred text” or “religious text,” I intend to focus on printed material as opposed to, e.g., spoken prayer or hymnic chant. However, text considered in this way still exceeds any one instance of printed material.

Furthermore, I consider “sacred” (or “religious,” I will use the terms interchangeably) texts to be a kind of artwork, so therefore the phrase “literary work of art” in this dissertation is not meant to exclude sacred texts. To say that a text is a literary work of art, briefly stated, means the work of revelatory truth is at work in it, and therefore the text is not merely the “expression” of the author’s beliefs in print form, but a construction of meaning born of the imagination that calls us as readers to respond with our own imaginative forming of meaning, and thereby the literary work of art exceeds any interpretation the author(s) might have had regarding her own text.¹⁴ In turn, the sacred

¹⁴I agree then with Tracy that the text offers us an “excess of meaning.” His idea that the text is a “structured whole” is very similar to my own ideas regarding the text. See Tracy, “Theological Method,” 48-9.

or religious literary work of art is a text that asserts the meaning of Being as a whole and therefore proclaims its authority to speak forth the ground or basis of existence, thereby producing and affirming certain values and moral principles. This explicit authority to create or endorse values differentiates the sacred text from other literary works of art. In doing so, it makes its authorial status explicit, i.e., becomes authoritative, and can be engaged on this level, bringing forth readers who cohere as a group in elevating its authoritative status as normative for themselves and possibly for others (i.e., it becomes something like Tracy's "classic"). These texts include, e.g., the Christian Bible, the Tanakh, the Upanishads, the *Daode jing* of Laozi, but also works with less authority (because derived from the central works) such as the letters of Clement, the Gospel of Judas, rabbinical sayings, etc. One can therefore read these texts in primarily two ways: inauthentically, that is with their authority uppermost in mind, so that one examines them for their power to convince or convert according to one's own previously held convictions—read this way, these texts will either simply be accepted or rejected by readers (virtual non-readers as it were, those who refuse to join the conversation, as Tracy describes). I contend, however, that these texts can be read a second way, namely with reverence, and therefore as still transformative, regardless of one's personal convictions. Reading in this way reveals the sacred to be that which has the power to fundamentally transform the reader, but not necessarily by "causing" one to convert to whatever beliefs are or are believed to be stipulated by the text. Although other literary works of art like novels, plays, etc. can become "sacred" and read "religiously" in that they grant the

possibility of transformation, these works can only become so if taken to be more than they are by building on a template of already known sacred literature.

To summarize, sacred texts are the creative and artistic expressions of certain worldviews, as Heidegger understands that term (see below). This is precisely, to my mind, what makes them so valuable, namely, they are a record of humankind's grappling with a metaphysical view of Being, and in that sense have to be overcome through engagement. It is extremely important, however, to realize that two notions of "the sacred" relate to the two forms of reading described above: the inauthentic sense of the sacred as that simply stipulated as such by a theo-political authority and used to enforce, for example, moral codes and divisions between communities; and the authentic sense of the sacred as that which transforms and offers the possibility of transformation and explicit becoming, and is called sacred precisely because of this possibility.

I differentiate reading itself, which I consider to be a special type of awareness, from particular reading practices, that is, whether a text is read silently, aloud, sung, etc. All such reading practices are to my mind legitimate forms of reading, although they will each undoubtedly change how readers interact with a particular text. Such interaction means reading is always an embodied activity, with no form of embodiment being inherently "better" or more important than another—though indeed certain forms are more appropriate than others given a particular text (it would be an odd practice, to say the least, to sing a cookbook or chant Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*). In addition, certain cultures and traditions have stipulated what kinds of texts should be, for example, sung or read silently, if indeed reading silently exists as a tradition for a given culture, as it did

not for the early centuries of Christianity. For my part, I use the term “reading” throughout this dissertation to signify the essential characteristic of all forms of human interaction with discourse, namely that we are always interpreting as Heidegger understands it (as *auslegen*), that is, we are oriented toward spoken or written discourse as something that presents itself as meaningful and offers us something about which we can talk and to which we can give a meaning. Reading understood this way is not equivalent to explicit, methodical interpretation (Heidegger’s *Interpretation*, a practice usually grounded in some theoretical perspective), a specific schema or thematic understanding of discourse according to a particular science or mode of knowledge, e.g., Freudian analysis, feminist interpretation, theological categories, etc., though it forms the ground for these more specific and perfectly legitimate “readings.” I trust that understanding reading in this way will help us fully comprehend its transformative power and the sacrality of those literary works of art that transform us in the very reading of them, and finally how the religious text can be read and cherished without supporting or denouncing its authoritative voice. Such a voice lends the sacred text the ability to answer any and all questions put to it, for the text is always able to be interpreted such that any problem or experience in the life of the reader is addressed. One must become aware of this voice and the text’s power to address the reader in order to discover how the sacred text transforms us regardless of our particular religious orientation. This awareness in turn leads to the authentic reading of such texts, that is, reading that makes the text sacred in the very practice of reading, whereas inauthentic reading bends to the weight of history and tradition by assuming that a particular sacred text must be “right”

(and so other sacred texts are “wrong” by default), and that we as readers are “wrong” if we do not accept the text’s moral codes, laws, doctrines, etc., that is, if we do not feel converted to a particular religious orientation. I will argue throughout this dissertation for a practice of reading that transforms us, that gives us a sense of our own becoming, without converting us to a supposedly permanent orientation, the latter a state of being that I contend does not exist for us since we bring forth only a moment of the self at any one time.

The term “discourse,” like “text,” has a range of meanings. At one end of the spectrum, “discourse” signifies speech alone, nothing written, but usually speech in some formal setting or mode, as in the phrase “to discourse on climate change.” The term also tends to imply dialogue, the back-and-forth flow of a conversation. The use of “discourse” is further expanded to include the more generic sense of “linguistic expression,” either written or spoken.¹⁵ I use the term in this latter fashion in order to focus on language as a human activity, as thinking, and therefore subject to evolution so to speak, not equivalent to a fixed “object” in our environment or a “stable” property of the human organism. In this way, all texts are ultimately discourse, but not all discourse takes the form of a text, especially not of a text understood as a literary work of art.

¹⁵One could continue to enumerate the variety of uses of this term *ad nauseam*, especially those uses within academic circles, such as “discourse analysis.” As discussed above, I will not be using “discourse” in the same way as that used in, e.g., discourse analysis in the field of literature, which is primarily concerned with the linguistic analysis of speech-acts of agents with particular regard to structures beyond the single sentence, ultimately applied by literary theorists to the analysis of meaning within a dialogue or conversation. Not only does my notion of text include and encompass more than dialogue and conversation, but the application of speech-act theory widely used in this form of discourse analysis depends on certain philosophical assumptions about texts and language I am unwilling to make. Instead, I am much more interested in an understanding of language and text that allows us to see how both can give rise to something like speech-act theory and support it, and such an interest returns us to my thesis and its focus on the “essence” of language and reading.

Understood broadly as human linguistic activity, discourse can be seen in Heideggerian terms, that is, language's simple yet profound power to bring forward something to talk about, prior to any manipulation of that saying by way of a judgment, a proposition, or a description, etc. of it. Although we as human beings have the ability to modify how we talk about something by describing it, evaluating it, asserting it, etc., language proper is not fully within our sphere of control—that we reveal beings through discourse, that beings *are* as Heidegger might say, is not something up to us. Discourse then is the fundamental bringing to light (revealing, uncovering, dis-covering) of things (entities, beings) in language. Discourse discloses beings, and is the ground on which reference or a notion of a word's correspondence to a thing works. Focusing on this “essence” of discourse, i.e., the revelation of entities from those entities themselves, will allow Heidegger to make the leap to his claim that language is doing the speaking, not us—a notion to be explained further in chapter 3. With this notion in mind, all vocalized and written forms of language are fundamentally revelatory discourse, but how that revelation comes about is changeable, e.g., one may assert something, point something out, ask for something, or even cover something up by lying or erring in one's description.

From this point of view, all texts are discourse, but how they talk about whatever is “in” their respective forms of discourse can greatly differ, e.g., a text may be a novel, dialogue, argumentative prose, poetry, or a combination of genres and speech-acts. To repeat, then, every literary work of art, every sacred text, is a discourse, but not every discourse (any human linguistic activity) is a text in my terms (planned, imaginative artistic work), even though discourse in the form, e.g., of an entire unwritten conversation

is still revelatory (and so one could stretch the definition and consider all discourse as able to be divided into “good” or “poor” works of art).

The terms “self” and “others” (and with respect to readers and reading, the others are the authors, Tracy’s conversation partners, as it were) used throughout the previous sections are important for developing how my thesis has particular importance for scriptural and other religious texts. As such, they call for clarification. As Heidegger explains in his description of what he calls *Mitwelt* (literally, “with-world”—*BT* 154-5), other human beings are not encountered by first understanding an “I” or self distinguished from other selves (which Heidegger points out entails considering selves countable things), but are already ontologically understood as part of the world, that is, the world is something shared by others and the I-self, and it is part of Dasein’s primordial understanding of the world that beings are to be encountered by both the self and others. Another person is not essentially understood via analogy to myself. Others are “from” and arise “with” the world, Dasein’s “environment,” indeed form that environment. In this way, Heidegger makes the point that Dasein (what I myself am) only comes to understand itself by looking away from any theoretical notion of self toward Dasein’s actions and effects on things it cares for in the world. Such essential sharing is part of how we read or interpret texts, that is, texts are understood as proffered by others with whom we are in the world, and is also the reason why opposed readings or the refusal to read altogether can be the seed of actual violence, for nothing less than the world is at stake. I therefore want to emphasize throughout this dissertation that the author (the other or others) of a text is not simply a vague and unimportant shadowy subject, but a human

being whose discourse, as the imaginative structuring of how that other human being builds a world with the reader, helps complete one's own humanity.

As will be explained in more detail in chapter 3, Heidegger's notion of self resonates with Sartre's, who also conceives the self as having primary understanding of itself through others, but defines those others as separate consciousnesses, which does not make them "essentially" other on Heidegger's view (i.e., they are simply more of the same, replicated I's as it were, or I am a replicate of others). This difference between the two thinkers is why I focus on Heidegger's "definition" of others. For Heidegger, another person is never reducible to thing-ness, not even a "human" thing present-at-hand, for, as Heidegger makes clear, Dasein resists such reducibility to the point of death. Attempting to reduce Dasein in this way only results in violence or indifference, not an "actualizing" of thing-hood.¹⁶ For Heidegger, then, part of being human is "Being-with" other Dasein, who are what he calls "Dasein-with" me—that is, the self is always with others, even when alone, for this is part of its ontological constitution. The others are not simply other beings like me, but Being-with is an essential part of being human, such that "with-ness" is "there" even in the case of a solitary person. With regard to my thesis, even reading alone in a private room is always and still an encounter with another human being, for we not only "bring" the world along with us, but we also encounter that other person through the artifact of the book and the discourse within it that implies world.

Before moving on to the final part of this section, a clarification of what I mean by "beliefs" is in order. It will become clear throughout the dissertation that this term often

¹⁶See, for example, *BT* 162-3.

has a negative connotation, the reason being that it is often shorthand for the term “propositional beliefs.” Given that (post)modernity still labors under the concept of the Cartesian ego, such beliefs are considered synonymous with opinions and opposed to “truth” or fact. In other words, we are always tempted to attach an “I” to the verb “believe,” but an “I” always considered an ego-subject in Cartesian terms. This amounts to conceiving beliefs as sentences that “I” always agree or disagree with, i.e., they are timeless statements that “I” consider either correct or incorrect. Many readers, therefore, read sacred texts with an eye toward extracting a system of beliefs that they will either agree to or discard as useless, a practice which never interrogates the self, or in Tracy’s terms, never allows the reader to truly enter the conversation and ask questions. What I propose instead is the notion of a “subject-less” belief, not that beliefs do not or should not exist. There is a way to understand belief that does not follow the path of the Cartesian ego, nor assumes that truth is best defined as correctness. To my mind, awareness of the responsibility of creating a meaning for our texts, sacred and otherwise, helps us move beyond the metaphysically oriented worldviews explained and invented by, e.g., religious literature, as well as helps us recognize what could be termed an authentic self. The concept of the worldview, in Heidegger’s sense, itself requires more explanation, and is further described below.

In several works (“The Age of the World Picture,” “The Essence of Truth,” the conclusion of “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” and others), Heidegger makes clear that what he calls values and worldviews are products of metaphysical thinking, which, he contends, is also our primary way of first encountering beings, that is, as objects ready-to-

hand and present-at-hand, only to be used and the being of which is lost on us (we do not see beings as beings, but as objects). I understand the modern notion of “beliefs” to be synonymous with the way Heidegger uses “values,” that is, they imply a system of evaluation (that is, a “worldview”) of not just what we are accustomed to call things, but also people, modes of thinking, art, etc., that reduces all such things to only what is considered their worth in and for the system. In making all things conform to a given system, the person herself becomes an object in the system, defining herself and others according to how they “measure up” in it, which is now largely a moral or ethical code of conduct directing which actions, thoughts, and things should be avoided or adhered to. Throughout this dissertation, “beliefs” will often be discussed in conjunction with inauthentic reading and therefore will imply a worldview, that is, a subject-based evaluative system that designates the worth or “goodness” of everything for all time, past and future.

The problematic nature of worldviews demands further clarification, however. Because evaluation originates through Dasein’s interaction with entities and is inherent therefore in being human, beliefs understood as statements bound to a Cartesian subject could be considered our “primary” mode of believing (akin to how we *first* take other beings to be mere objects), and are often made explicit as a code of conduct, laws, lists of propositions, etc. considered to be timeless and authoritarian. As such, a system of beliefs (a dogma, a doctrine) not only rejects the notion that meaning is equivalent to use in denying the efficacy of context through its claim to encompass every context, but also denies that Dasein is a finitude, that is, a limitation that clears a space for Being and truth

and the horizon of which is changeable. The timeless authority asserted by worldviews is therefore not only blind to how Dasein clears a space for truth, but also cannot see that the self is always in the mode of becoming because it has fixed the horizon in place, as it were. With regard to reading, the authentic reader is able to make explicit this primary metaphysical response to beings (subject-oriented in timelessness), and thereby deconstruct it and come to understand her essence as that clearing whereby entities and truth can be allowed to be (this is akin to how Tracy believes reading religious texts helps us reflect on what we think religion is). In so doing, she “overcomes” metaphysics by including it within her explicitly founded self (not by rejecting metaphysics as “bad”), she overcomes the tendency toward total subject-centeredness and thinking meaning is a private affair (as will be discussed in chapter 2), and she is no longer indifferent toward beings, especially other persons, but is explicitly aware of their humanity and wants to hear what they have to say. Such a reader understands that entities are not reducible to objects, nor is the self reducible to the verification of subject-centered beliefs. In sum, the worldview or system of beliefs is dangerous precisely because *a* being (Dasein) substitutes itself for Being, thereby making it impossible to come to any authentic understanding of either self or Being. Those readers, then, who do not read authentically can only create a meaning for the text from some particular metaphysical orientation (moral, scientific, theological, etc. worldviews) toward beings. For such readers, and as history has unfortunately so often shown, if what the text is saying cannot be made to or does not conform to the particular view held, the text will be rejected, despised, or both,

the practical effect of which, when such readers hold political power, is censorship, destruction of books, imprisonment of readers and authors, or an attempt at all three.

Finally, I turn toward the last important element in this work's title, one which sets the stage for understanding reading as an engagement with another person or persons: the notion of the inexpressible or ineffable. Although I accept the possibility of ineffability, I do not conceive of it as it has traditionally been.¹⁷ I consider the ineffable to be always "there" as structuring the ever-emerging reader-self; it is the wonder and terror of realizing another voice has spoken when confronted with that other's call. The presence of this other voice means the ineffable is what was not and could not have been

¹⁷For example, Jean-Luc Marion offers this "definition": "In effect, certain phenomena are characterized by the uncontrollable excess of intuition within them, above and beyond all of the meanings that we will ever be able to assign to them." See Jean-Luc Marion, introduction to *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 3. If we follow Wittgenstein, however, everything has an "excess of intuition" within it. Michael Sells discusses what he calls the "aporia of transcendence," i.e., the feeling that one has to name the transcendent that has already been "defined" as beyond naming. Sells argues that apophatic theology brings about a new discourse by accepting the aporia and that its texts "perform ineffability" in that their paradoxes are real. He claims that their paradoxes do not render such texts illogical, for "referents" are "left open" in apophysis. See Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 2-4. Sells' mixing of the language of referents and mysticism I find to be flawed, for it seems that then the mystical is primarily a thing that evades epistemological access. David Klemm seems to echo this notion that the ineffable is ultimately a failure of description that could theoretically be corrected by the addition of a different sensory organ, for he connects the unspeakable with the invisible: "[N]o model can successfully represent the ineffable structure that it intends to make present and perceptible...Models are human constructs, born of the imagination. They attempt to make visible what is forever invisible." See David E. Klemm, "Depth Hermeneutic and the Literary Work of Art: Religious Tradition, Hermeneutic Theory and Nihilism," in *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeffrey F. Keuss (Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 80-1. Notice also the denigration of the imagination as merely an image maker, a mimicker or copier of "more real" things. Finally, André Kukla mounts a defense of the "coherence" and possibility of ineffability, but one fully grounded in a theory of language based on mathematics, cognitive science, and logic: "My inclination is to use 'ineffability' to refer to the thesis that there are facts that defy expression" (4). For him, to say that "nothing can be said of God because He has no properties to represent, doesn't have anything to do with ineffability" (ibid.). In a similar vein, he claims ineffability is about "facts that nobody can state to anybody—not even to oneself" (75). Kukla argues for a Tarskian approach to language, the very idea of language I reject throughout this dissertation: "I take a language to be an abstract system of syntactic and semantic rules that delimits a class *C* of sentences that are either true or false, and I assume that the semantic rules of the language associate a truth-condition *X* to each sentence *S* in *C* such that *S* is true in the language if and only if the condition *X* is satisfied" (10). See André Kukla, *Ineffability and Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3-4, 10, and 75.

expressed by the self, although the self may now take up that other's expression and echo it, and so ineffability is often felt to be an overflow of meaning that somehow defies language. The prevailing notion of the inexpressible or unspeakable is, however, a reaction to, albeit still within, Western metaphysics. Negative or apophatic theology, for example, especially that of the Neoplatonic school, endorses the traditional metaphysical and ontological divide: the world is one of material objects seen as *semeia*, signs, pointing toward the higher truth of the One or God. From this perspective, the ineffable implies that the effable, language in its everyday sense, is fit only for physical description, predication, and reference, and that the "higher reality" is by definition beyond this use.

The apophatic theologian's questioning of predication is much needed for a deconstruction of orthodoxy and its reliance on doctrine and dogma defined as propositional statements of belief. Yet negative theology never questions metaphysical assumptions in the first place, and so never moves toward a true appreciation of language, text, or reading. Still constricted by the ontotheological structure of metaphysics, it can only assume language to be a performance of the human will in response to, for example, the Creation, a performance that ultimately fails when and if one tries to describe or "define" God. Language is still conceived metaphorically, that is, words, sentences, and texts all represent or point toward something else that is "superior" to them and knowledge of which is the primary goal of language.

By denying the central role of epistemology in language, that is, by questioning language's assumed role of knowledge or information transference, I have come to understand ineffability differently. Specifically within the practice of reading, ineffability

is the growing awareness, born from the reader's own sense of becoming, of others as those who share the world (Being-with) and for whom we cannot speak; yet this awareness in itself entails that language be the very possibility of sharing and completing thought. Authentic reading, however, understands that such sharing requires listening to, not speaking for, another, and thereby attempting to fill the void of ineffability. The ineffable is, then, not some region within an assumed geography of language, as if every use of language was limited by some boundary called "ineffability," but instead moves within the very heart of language as the unspoken and the unspeakable, not the indescribable. As hearers of another's discourse, the self is reduced to silence as it were, for only another person is able to express her own being-there, her Da-sein, as Heidegger would say.¹⁸

Contrary to endorsing the traditional metaphysical divide where all things are seen as metaphors of "higher" realities and in the process of semiosis, this way of understanding ineffability collapses that schism, or more precisely, understands that no

¹⁸Regina Schwartz argues that the "language of conversation" overcomes the idea of language as referential: "[I]n the language of conversation, some thing is not passed from one to another; rather some one hears when we call. What is heard is left indeterminate, but whatever it is, it is the only utterance we make while we live...According to Herbert, if we are unable to be heard, we are unable to speak." See Regina M. Schwartz, "From Ritual to Poetry: Herbert's Mystical Eucharist," in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 157. R. D. N. van Riessen reviews Heidegger's explanation of how God enters metaphysics in that the latter "seeks for the absolute ground of being, because it assumes that beings can be known by their common ground, and that the common ground can be known by us as Logos, Substance, Subject, Will, etc. In modernity, causation is the most common idea of being...Heidegger suggests that another way of thinking, one which is not obsessed by knowledge and the concept of God, would be more open to the experience of the godliness of God" (43). I would say this "being open" is being open to the call, though van Riessen goes on to claim that "some amount of propositional content is necessary for language to be meaningful" (49). She never examines critically enough the idea that language is primarily propositional or representational. See R. D. N. van Riessen, "Beyond Representation and Concept: The Language of Testimony," in *Religion and the Good Life*, ed. Marcel Sarot and Wessel Stoker, *Studies in Theology and Religion (Star)* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 43 and 49.

actual division between language and world exists in the first place. The question of whether things (always understood as some type of substance present before us) exist or not becomes a non-issue, as does objectification and representation. We are left with revelation, we are left to contemplate beings as beings, and in so doing glimpse, as it were, the great Nothing: that beings are not Being.¹⁹ Such contemplation defies theoretical method, conclusive definition, and propositional knowledge, and forces us to confront the question of who each of us is.²⁰

V. Methodology

As described in the previous sections, my primary approach to reading is as a form of engagement with another human being, and to that end I will be relying primarily on the thought of both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, whose ideas regarding language show it (and therefore texts) to be precisely this kind of sharing relationship. I supplement this approach, however, by placing it in dialogue with the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, whose notions of personhood and responsibility help complete my analysis of the reading process. Accordingly, the dissertation will have three stages. In chapter 2, I will outline what I will be using of the non-propositional and non-

¹⁹This statement once again shows my indebtedness to Heidegger's thought. See *BT 26*: "The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity." See also Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 90-91 and 95 and Martin Heidegger, "Postscript to 'What Is Metaphysics?'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 233.

²⁰I use "theoretical" here to emphasize the technological view of beings and Being Heidegger argues we have. To understand reading as a questioning and creating of the reader's self is precisely not to have a putatively scientifically objective view of some phenomena or objects (reading, readers, texts) in hopes of explaining them away. Such understanding denies that there is something to define or categorize, and also denies that a "neutral" view of the self is authentic (attempting to come out of the reader-self and look back at the reader-self as something substantial and enduring).

objectifying philosophy of language suggested by Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. In chapter 3, I will place Wittgenstein's insights in contemplative dialogue with the work of Heidegger and Sartre. I will show that the resulting approach to language requires re-thinking the self of the reader as well as the reader's freedom and responsibility as she engages the text. In chapter 4, I will articulate an understanding of reading based on the investigations of the first two stages, an understanding focused on liberating the reading and understanding of texts from the shackles of not only propositionally descriptive theories of language and their correlative demand that the text be reducible to either one or a limited set of "meanings," but also from semiotic theories of language and their concomitant requirement that the text be only a configuration of signs. In addition, I will show that my own understanding of reading frees interpretation from conforming to an ontological distinction between "metaphorical" and "literal" meaning—the very distinction that Borg, for example, cannot seem to escape. That will allow me, in the concluding chapter, to return to the importance for the study of sacred and religious texts of the insights gained from the understanding and reconceptualization of reading that has been developed in the preceding chapters.

With regard to the first stage, explaining, examining, and analyzing Wittgenstein's work allows me to demonstrate that, irrespective of a reader's awareness of theories of language, how one creates meaning implies a certain understanding of how meaning arises in language in general. I find Wittgenstein's concept of "meaning as use" and his own illustrative examples of language games and reflections on those games invaluable for understanding the reading process, for it shows language use to be an inventive and

evolving human practice with a variety of forms (the language of science, art, etc.). His later philosophy, in its response to relativism, solipsism, realism, and the positivist version of truth propounded and exalted by Frege and Russell, among others, is fertile ground for the development of a new understanding of language—and thus for coming to understand anew how a text “possesses” meaning. Wittgenstein insists that language is not a description of objects, objects existing either physically in the world or stored in the mind of the author; and he denies, as I do, those philosophical approaches toward language which reduce to some type of behaviorism, such as correspondence theories of meaning that claim meanings of words are the objects or states of mind they denote, and therefore thoughts and beliefs are the “output” of linguistic “input.”

In the second stage of the dissertation, I will use Heidegger’s thought both to add a further dimension to Wittgenstein’s views of language and to anchor my own thinking regarding the text as a work of art that helps form, in the very reading of it, the reader’s self. Heidegger not only critiques the very metaphysics of subject and object that allows for such distinctions as that between the “literal” and “metaphorical” meanings of words in the first place, but his views also allow us to understand the text not as a symbol or abstraction away from a pre-conceived and pre-linguistic “real,” but as an original and originarily poetic language whose meaning is completed by a reader—and not through the correspondence of words to objects or the play of signs. Heidegger’s view of language, then, more systematically uncovers how we are ontologically always with others (“Being-with”) and so understands the literary work of art (the “text” in this dissertation) as a “working” of this with, the very mode of being whereby we engage others.

Sartre's work, on the other hand, I use largely as a foil for Heidegger's; but I also find his thoughts on freedom and responsibility inspiring and helpful for my own conception of the "responsible" reader, who creates meaning in reading rather than assuming it is somehow already there determined by the language of the text (which is not to deny that readers often feel "guided" by the text itself during their reading). Sartre's notions of freedom and responsibility help complete my argument by reminding us of the reader's humanity, a reader whose task as it were is to come to an awareness of self as "condemned" to being free, that is, undetermined by any stable center conceived in the form of "naturally" occurring beliefs or systems of morality and ethics that are "discoverable" and irrefragable, and therefore must necessarily be adopted. Realizing we "determine" our own beliefs by imaginatively constructing them is the final step in understanding our own responsibility in creating (poiesis) beliefs through reading the text.

The works of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Sartre all seem to support this indeterminate quality in language. Guidance is not found solely within the reader, nor solely in the text, nor in some hybrid of the two entities, text and reader.²¹ Rather, the guidance and belief-making power of reading a text is exactly similar to the guidance and belief-making power of discourse in general, that is, the particular form listening takes, otherwise called "interpretation." Following Wittgenstein, guidance cannot be a

²¹In a study of modern American poetry, David Walker seems to make precisely this division: "The question of the relative determinacy and indeterminacy of texts, of the interdependent roles of text and reader in the alchemy of meaning, is enormously complex and finally mysterious." See David Walker, *The Transparent Lyric: Reading and Meaning in the Poetry of Stevens and Williams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), xiii. Walker seems here to simply give up trying to understand what a text is, who a reader is, and ultimately what reading itself is.

“private” affair as if responding to private signs, a private language. As Sartre might put it, we are dependent on another consciousness in order to have discourse and therefore meaning. But that dependence is itself “interpreted”—the guidance we seek is itself an imaginative poiesis, in terms of this dissertation, a poiesis dependent on the ground of the text, the literary work of art, be it a novel or sacred book. In the third stage of the dissertation, therefore, I will bring out how the text as literary art brings something forth by which we can be guided—by a guidance, however, that is not somehow inherent in the text as if contained by it. How we “use” that art is dependent on our own hermeneutical imagination, and so our own act of meaning-creation is imaginative (a viewing or inventing of new possibilities, an originating power) and “poetic” (*poiesis*: a making, a building of something) in itself. The artistic use to which we put literary art, otherwise called the “meaning” of the work, depends on our own imaginative engagement with language and our confrontation with the inexpressible. To explore this notion of the reader as artist, I will turn again to Heidegger’s later essays. Against a characterization of the self as equivalent to the Cartesian ego, Heidegger claims that language speaks “through” us and is the primary mode of dis-closure and dis-covery, that is, the uncovering or unconcealing of entities so that they may “express” themselves as they are, before any judgment be made about them. In this sense, dis-covering (uncovering, disclosing) is the primordial truth, on which is built other notions and theories of truth such as coherence, correspondence (“agreement”), etc.²² In other words, we can designate

²²Martin Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 300.

with language only because language is something other than a tool for designation. Heidegger argues that this conception of language is possible only if we deny the Cartesian notion of the cogito, that the self is not essentially an ego-subject over against objects whose properties are described or utilized for the satisfaction of needs. Neither is the self merely the play of signs and structures, nor the work of art (textual or otherwise) merely the representation of something else. Signs too are set up “over against” a me who is conscious of them, and therefore still require a robust notion of subjectivity. Heidegger’s very notion of art, artist, and preserver (see below, chapter 3) rests on this rethinking the “nature” of the self. In the final stage and conclusion of the dissertation, I will propose that the reader too is an artist in that she is a maker of meaning, best understood not as an ego-subject over against the object of the text, even if the text is knowingly or actually treated as an object by the reader, an action in which the reader would become a “failed” artist in her own right. We risk much by not reading the text artistically, for the poiesis of meaning signifies a metamorphosis of self, a transcendence not to some all-knowing One, but, as Heidegger might say, to an authentic self and therefore a world.

VI. Rationale and Significance

The central task of this dissertation is to clear up a misunderstanding of reading without denigrating the activity of reading. Misunderstanding the reading process implies a misunderstanding of texts and language in general, and results in attempting to define them functionally as to what they “do” (or ought to do) and thence to determine if what they do is important and/or useful. With regard to sacred texts in particular, this

functionalist approach categorizes such texts primarily as conduits of information (propositions) representing or asserting certain beliefs, and in the case of those who already consider a particular religion the authority under which they live, such beliefs are considered overwhelmingly truthful and so “force” themselves on both the author(s) of the text and its readers. This kind of reading results in interpreting texts according to a preconceived system of beliefs (Heidegger’s idea of the worldview), the reader effectively becoming less than a whole person by nullifying any sense of her own responsibility as reader—she is compelled by her own interpretative practice to simply adopt what are already considered “good,” “truthful,” and “right” beliefs directly from the text regardless of context (the “literal” type of reader). This kind of inauthentic reading has another dimension, namely that the author too is portrayed as less than a whole person in that she is considered a mere conduit of timeless, self-validating beliefs that pre-exist humanity, which nullifies her responsibility for creating a work of art. Both “reductions” as it were have the same result, namely, religious beliefs in cultures or communities where sacred texts are of paramount or central importance are very often considered to be directly caused by (the reading of) the text, that is, eternally good, right, true beliefs are related by the text and simply await discovery and adoption because of their evident authority. By removing creative responsibility from the human being, such a reading practice does not recognize the humanity of authors and readers completely but reduces them to automata, viz., recorders or reciters. It does not recognize text and discourse as constructions of the imagination, but reduces them to vehicles for information whose “correct” interpretation is somehow evident. This kind of reading practice, therefore, does not grasp the human

responsibility for poiesis, but is blind to it, and finally does not recognize the human being to be always evolving, always in the process of becoming, but instead believes her merely to be an object whose missing pieces are “right” beliefs. This desire for the final, correct interpretation has ethical ramifications: it dictates behavior through supposed eternal beliefs, often to the detriment of the whole human community by alienating others who do not hold the same beliefs as “evil,” “sinners,” “liars,” or “lost,” beings best forgotten or perhaps annihilated, either physically or through a forced assimilation or conversion that destroys their sense of identity, that is, their freedom to interpret existence and create their own selves. The sensitivity and engaged tolerance for heterodoxy that is the result of authentic reading and for which I argue in this dissertation extends the thought of Tracy and others like him and helps make a global or “planetary” community a living possibility.

By avoiding a philosophy of language that would substantiate the reading practice described above, one that would be forced to claim language supplies us with fundamental, immutable laws of behavior through the use of signs and definitions, this dissertation also helps resolve the connection between the meaning “found” within a text and a philosophical conceptualization of language. Borg’s conflating of the literal and the metaphorical, for example, reveals that a propositional understanding of language still serves as the paradigm for textual interpretation, especially when those texts are considered sacred. Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s understanding of language gives us a much-needed different way of reading, one in which religious beliefs and experiences are understood *through* the text, not from it or “because” of it. Beliefs in text-based sacred

traditions depend on the imaginative formation of meaning, a forming of self that momentarily resolves the crisis of becoming a person by reading the literary work of art that is the sacred text. To help explain the rationale behind my thesis, the rest of this section will give a brief overview and foreshadowing of common misunderstandings of reading, misunderstandings I will challenge throughout this dissertation as not only inadequate to explain how meaning arises in general, but also as incapable of making reading more than a transference or processing of information, which is wrongly assumed to determine or cause beliefs.

Put simply, reading is an engagement with at least one other human being and therefore always calls to the reader to reflect on *how* to engage that other, which is something that normally falls under the heading of “ethics.” Our modern, technological orientation to Being, however, masks the reality that texts are this call, and instead strongly encourages us to think of texts as objects that require valuation and evaluation. Such valuation can take many forms; for example, literature is segregated into “fiction” and “non-fiction,” the unspoken assumption being that fiction is considered less “real” or “truthful” than non-fiction and therefore not as “worthwhile” or useful.

Of course many readers reject this conclusion, but not by rethinking Dasein’s typical orientation toward Being (what Heidegger calls “falling” [*Verfallen*]) and perhaps avoiding the desire to objectify beings and an associated calculative system of beliefs (that is, a worldview that organizes and evaluates the worth of all beings), but precisely by insisting on yet another problematic view of reading and texts. Holders of this view uncritically accept that the “best” fiction teaches moral “truths” that are more important

than historical and scientific facts.²³ But reading based on such a notion (a kind of Aristotelian theory of reading) still remains a secret attempt to justify the writing and existence of texts as useful objects, implying that the sole—at least the most important and elemental—intention of discourse is moral didacticism and that those texts whose moral beliefs are questionable can be safely ignored or, even worse, censored or destroyed (a conclusion many such readers do not necessarily see, but someone like Plato did). Still other readers reject the destruction of those texts that offer what seem to them objectionable beliefs, thinking that an appeal to tolerance or plurality is enough to save the text (Tracy’s “repressive tolerance”), yet never questioning their own reducing of texts to worldviews and theoretical systems of “belief.”²⁴ However, such thinking effectively ignores those texts that seem to conform to different perspectives, since it amounts to saying that we cannot or should not criticize these worldviews and simply live with them, and thereby safely dispenses with them as a necessary dialogue partner. Such thinking can become especially prominent when we encounter sacred texts, which often we as readers either reject outright or engage but only with mild curiosity, assuming that if we do not “agree” with the text, that it cannot or does not “speak” to us. Of course, many such texts make a moral “ought” or code of conduct their primary and explicit theme, and so invite the reader to “agree” with them. Yet even here I hope to show that

²³Cf. Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 69 and 77.

²⁴Here I think Tracy risks being “lazily” tolerant himself, for he urges us to respect different systems of belief but, in adopting referential and semiotic theories of language, must conclude that a text, especially a sacred text, is essentially nothing more than a conduit for a particular perspective, not a conversation one can meaningfully engage.

disagreement with a text's expressed theme can be part of authentic reading practice and is not tantamount to safely ignoring the text, but instead includes that text as a way of inquiry into the self and possibilities of being. My claim is that sacred texts, as literary works of art, *call* to us to consider our own becoming, and that to read such texts authentically is to deconstruct the mode of self in which we calculate the worth of objects and arrive at a value to be assigned to them, and instead imbue the act of reading with the sacrality it already has and always promises.²⁵

Another hindrance to seeing the text as a work of art, in addition to understanding the nature of entities as discrete subjects and/or objects, is believing language to be nothing more than semiosis or a sign-system. Going down either or both of these paths (i.e., object-orientation or thinking language to be a system of signs) forces us to divide language from the world, text from what might be called "reality," subject from object, etc., and seek a mediator that somehow gives us access to our own minds, the text, and that to which the text refers, all three. Once more, there are a variety of ways in which such thinking unfolds. One can take the traditional metaphysical route of realism (truth is conceived as a matter of correspondence to or agreement with "real" objects, concrete or abstract, those objects themselves being conceived as Platonic Forms, or material substances, or however, and meaning is conceived as a matter of reference), or the route of Kantian thought (we have access only to "things as they appear," never able to reach

²⁵Klemm argues, erroneously I think, that we lack a clear division between the sacred and the profane: "One symptom of our situation as interpreters [a "desacralized world of interpretation"] is the fact that we do not possess a clear criterion for distinguishing between sacred and profane texts or experiences." Klemm is overwhelmed with the notion of a science of interpretation, and is searching for "a principled distinction between sacred and profane texts and activities of interpretation." See Klemm, "Depth Hermeneutic and the Literary Work of Art: Religious Tradition, Hermeneutic Theory and Nihilism," 77.

the “thing in itself,” and must rely on the “synthetic” power of imagination to weave perceptions into a whole and thence into a holistic meaning), or maybe even the route of “postmodern” theories in general (the interplay of signs is all that exists since the anchor of a “transcendental signified” is removed, leaving meaning to be the result of cultural tradition, community “agreement,” etc.). But all such theories, regardless of their particular philosophical orientation, deny the text to be revelatory of beings by agreeing that “access” to the real is either a problem in itself or is entirely non-existent.²⁶ The art that is the text cannot express itself, cannot offer itself to the reader, for it too has been reduced to mediation (it can only signify the “real” or is itself a play of signs, a kind of unconscious outpouring of another person who herself is determined by psychological traits, culture, tradition, etc.). Put another way, all such theories silence other persons *qua* others completely, their speaking and humanity reduced to nothing more than reflection or refraction of psychological traits, cultural norms, etc., signs to be decoded or “interpreted” by the reader, whose only resource is more signs and unconscious behaviors determined by language. All such thinking collectively views language and texts with suspicion, regardless of any overt enthusiasm for literature or respect for language espoused by holders of such views. The existence of either an absolute subject or object

²⁶Brian Clack has a useful discussion of these theoretical assumptions with regard to religious language. He argues that the positivists defined religious language as “non-descriptive” (not illogical), so therefore it was “non-cognitive,” i.e., it was “expressivist,” “emotional,” and “attitudinal.” The positivists then came to the conclusion that religion is not about knowledge and beliefs (their idea of the “real”), but about expressing attitudes and emotions, theories that make of religion nothing more than a “commitment” to certain practices. See Brian R. Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40 (August 1996): 53. Scott Holland seems to echo this positivist assumption, claiming that theology is “rhetorical and pragmatic” and that “thought is cultural-linguistic,” allowing us to “come to consciousness in language.” See Scott Holland, “Theology Is a Kind of Writing: The Emergence of Theopoetics,” *Cross Currents* 47, no. 3 (1997): 319 and 330n26.

is never questioned, and the self becomes nothing more than a being whose essence is particular traits and characteristics who faces an object, also endowed with particular traits and characteristics, and which the subject is now tasked with evaluating as to its agreement with the “real,” i.e., how “truthful” it is, and in what way. From this notion of truth derives a notion of value, that which is true being somehow “good” for us, that which is false, somehow “bad.” This calculative and therefore mechanized and technological approach to reading annihilates any notion of persons as Being-with, as where truth happens, and both readers and texts (and the others who create them) become one more thing to be calculated and subsumed by a system or theory. The dehumanization of the text not only dehumanizes the authors, but the reader as well, and any hope of becoming an authentic self is lost. This dissertation proposes a different understanding of reading because of this ethical concern, an understanding that results in authentic dialogue that promotes well-being.

The work of this dissertation is not, therefore, to take up realism, or idealism, or skepticism and somehow “disprove” them, but to show that what seems to be problematic about reading texts is no problem at all, once certain assumptions about language are relinquished. For example, all the theories of language briefly discussed in the previous paragraph seem to assume that language, and therefore meaning and interpretation, poses a kind of problem in that it is not consistently and reliably “truthful,” and as such is something that must be explained or “made” to be truthful (that is, “corrected”). But Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and even Sartre, urge us to understand that an abundance of meaning and interpretation is not due to faults or weaknesses within language itself, but

because there are multiple “situations” of interpretation, implying that creating meaning is part of the ontological structure of being human, not a difficulty or trap one needs to escape.²⁷ Only by making certain ontological assumptions does one come to view interpretation or meaning as an epistemological puzzle, one that, as previously stated, bifurcates roughly into finding the source of meaning within the individual or community (subject-centered), or alternatively, within text and language themselves (object-centered). The former path leads to the further difficulties of “private” languages, linguistic determinism, language as the expression of mental content, etc., the latter path to the further difficulties of seeing words as labels, the sense-reference distinction, etc. Building on what the three thinkers central to this dissertation have said, I will argue that the need to uncover meaning arises from the anxiety of the reader’s or hearer’s responsibility for understanding her world, a responsibility that touches each being-there, every Dasein, and thereby individualizes us. It is our turning away from this responsibility that leaves us grasping for a theory of language, and reducing the meaning of a text to the promulgation of a certain system of beliefs, a worldview. To realize our responsibility in the imaginative creation of meaning, however, is to recognize there is no law of interpretation to guide us, but only a language not our own, i.e., language that

²⁷David Cooper argues against what he calls the “standard view” of Heidegger and Wittgenstein, namely that they were “anthropocentric” and “lacked humility.” He also argues that the standard view is wrong in thinking that Wittgenstein became less “mystical” and more “pragmatic,” while Heidegger did the opposite. Cooper instead claims that both thinkers were “enemies” of skepticism and that their later philosophies are not “incompatible with antihumanist humility” (112). For him, both thinkers want us to “appreciate” the “mystery of being,” and therefore appreciate “being human” (117). Although I am sympathetic towards Cooper’s views, I find his description of Heidegger’s thought rather conventionalist and prone to error, as well as his assertion that language and world are separate, as if two different entities. See David E. Cooper, “Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Humility,” *Philosophy: The Journal of the British Institute of Philosophical Studies* 72, no. 279 (1997): 106-109, 112, 116-17.

always belongs to another and is unable to be privately or exclusively held by a “subject.” It is only at this limit of the expressible, the negation of meaning, that an authentic self has the possibility to be born.

The reasoning behind the dissertation’s structure is, then, resistance to proposing or supporting any “theory” of reading or language whereby both readers and texts become nothing more than “material” for the theory and conform to that theory, analogous to the way that, according to Heidegger, religions can become nothing more than material for the “philosophy of religion.”²⁸ To assert such theories is to become more interested in the architecture of that theoretical understanding rather than in reading itself. The theoretical point of view does, however, assert or imply that its discoveries are “true” (always understood in the object-oriented sense of correctness Heidegger talks about), so it becomes necessary for me throughout this dissertation to focus also on truth, namely the truth in language and art. This is not a subspecies of a more general truth, but the ground of truth itself, as will be explained in chapter 3. Briefly put, truth should be primarily conceived as authenticity and revelation, yet this possibility is only offered to us through language understood primarily as uncovering, that is, discourse considered a work of art

²⁸See Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. John Sallis, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *Studies in Continental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 52-3 and also G. P. Baker and P. M. S. Hacker’s indictment of philosophies of language: “Philosophy of language, as commonly conceived, has no coherent subject-matter, and its artifacts are uniformly nonsensical. There is no such thing as a theory of meaning for a language, and hence there is no such thing as a significant contribution to such an enterprise” (387). They use the same strong and unforgiving language later on: “Theories of meaning are not merely confused, but also lack any purpose” (389). Although I am sympathetic towards their Wittgensteinian approach to language, they seem to believe that nothing can be learned from making mistakes regarding language, mistakes for which Wittgenstein has great sympathy. See Gordon P. Baker and Peter M. S. Hacker, *Language, Sense and Nonsense: A Critical Investigation into Modern Theories of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 387 and 389. See also footnote 21 above.

that may be good or poor. Truth also then shares an intimate relationship with the imagination as the creative engagement with one's situatedness, with the world one shares and that arises with others. Accepting this different conception of truth, the dissertation helps explain how reading offers us a genuine encounter with others and truth, and a genuine basis from which to face "ethical" or "moral" questions. It is in these last points that I see the "theological" inheritance of this work, for it seems that most if not all sacred texts and religious questions revolve around a questioning of the self insofar as they exhibit a clear desire to form the self and its relations with others.²⁹

Finally, I hope that this dissertation will offer the possibility of a new conception of religious experience in a world growing ever more religiously divisive. In order to learn to understand a text differently, readers must engage in dialogue and step into each other's religious worlds, thereby coming to the profound sense of "tolerance" as engagement with others to which Tracy exhorts his readers, not simply a letting be as "letting alone." Creating the possibility of such experience is indeed the province of poiesis, and this dissertation will serve as a recognition of the poetic and renewing, if not humane nature of sacred texts.

VII. Chapter Outline

The following dissertation is an attempt to explain this awakening of questioning the self through the act of understanding what a text means, what I have termed the

²⁹Cf. Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 150: we leave behind the problem of finding God and turn it into "a discussion of the conditions of experiencing God...the problem of what I am myself." Stephen Mulhall claims that the question of self (Dasein) is also a "theological" question in that theology "assumes" an answer to being. See Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 218.

“hermeneutics of reading,” given what Wittgenstein and Heidegger say regarding language and the process of interpretation. Chapter 2 opens the discussion by extrapolating from Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language an understanding of how meaning arises through reading. I offer there a brief summation of Wittgenstein’s thought, and sketch out how he understood his own thought to dissolve what he considered the seeming problems of solipsism, relativism, idealism, or realism, views which directly address the creation of meaning in language and the importance or “value” such meaning should have in our lives. I also argue that, unlike many contemporary thinkers who believe Wittgenstein to be a fideist or communitarian when it comes to beliefs and meaning, Wittgenstein’s thought is able to explain linguistic innovation, that we are not determined by our languages and bound to certain meanings. The ever-evolving nature of meaning and thought paves the way for a discussion of truth, responsibility, and self, undertaken in chapter 3.

In that third chapter, I use Heidegger’s view of language as discourse, the presenting of the “thing itself” (in the phenomenological sense), to claim that the text is also discourse, the creative (poetic), dis-covering activity of another human being. As such discourse, the text is not the representation of something or someone else, nor is it a form of mediation for uniting discrete subject-entities, but the very “place,” as it were, where meaning occurs. A corollary of conceiving text this way is understanding truth as Heidegger does, which is as this very offering of beings themselves, an offering which allows us to have an understanding of Being. I therefore briefly describe how other prevailing theories of truth fall short of understanding the truth of the text. I also stress

the human quality of the text, and that the process of meaning-creation offers readers the possibility of authentic self-poiesis. In this section, I also contend that as a work of art, the text is the working of another's imagination as she engages Being, a call to the reader to imaginatively respond through forming a meaning, i.e., interpreting the text. I argue that such forming can remain inauthentic, that is, one can impose on the text a certain worldview or system of beliefs, or consider such beliefs to be "caused" or innate in the text itself. Authentic reading, on the other hand, avoids the pitfalls of orthodox interpretations (orthodox in the sense of excluding all meanings but one), of the duality of self and other conceived as stable entities, and instead understands meaning, and therefore humanity, always to be in a process of becoming. This creative process of change is in fact the creative work that the imagination (with the contemporary meaning of source of originality, new vision, maker of alternate possibilities) itself does. Authentic reading is the poetic, creative understanding of another through the imaginative, poetic product of that other—the text.

A further element to chapter 3 is a discussion of Sartre's view of the imagination and consciousness, both to set the stage for a longer discussion of imagination in chapter 4 and to flesh out notions of truth and responsibility with respect to how the self engages another self. For Sartre, values or beliefs are not "transcendent," and we realize this through "anguish," the echo of our own responsibility and freedom. Seen from this point of view, the freedom and responsibility inherent in the creation of meaning makes possible the deconstruction of beliefs as precepts either given to or "found" by us. However, it is evident that Sartre does not radically reconceive language, and using

Heidegger's own work as a critique, I destabilize the static and isolated qualities of the self that Sartre's theory of consciousness entails.

Chapter 4 ties together and makes explicit connections between Wittgenstein's and Heidegger's conceptions of language in an attempt to explain the hermeneutics of reading itself. Here I deconstruct more completely inauthentic reading and its connection to meaning-creation via an object-orientation and therefore a system of rules or beliefs. I also more fully explain the imagination's connection not only to the poiesis of meaning, but to the poiesis of self, hinting that language is itself a reaching out or grasping of, and perhaps is, the imagination, for it is in interpreting our own situation that the concept of possibility first strikes us—the individual is the very making of possibility, and therefore *first* discovers selves and others in this mode, as associated with the I; authentic self-poiesis, however, is an explicit interpretation of existence (explicit *Auslegung*, to use Heidegger's terminology) where we creatively make the I and no longer consider it a found object like others, one with simply privileged status. Although we are always interpreting existence, and so reading is always the poiesis of a meaning, like the self, reading too can be authentic or inauthentic. In this chapter, I also renew my arguments that texts are discourse and help make up what Heidegger calls the “house of Being,” that is, language. I explain how the creation of meaning as the poiesis of beliefs is a making of self, the authenticity of which depends on our willingness to engage the inexpressible, that meaning cannot be assumed and is never completed or final. Instead, reading makes possible the deconstruction of the “they-self” and thereby clears the way for wonder, the authentic response to beings and Being. I conclude chapter 4 with a reflection on the

reading of sacred texts, demonstrating that a hermeneutics of reading helps us revivify our understanding of sacred texts as literary works of art, not as lists of dogmatic assertions or tools of monolithic orthodoxy that “cause” certain types of beliefs and behavior.

In the conclusion, I draw out the implications of authentic reading for ethics, claiming that a different understanding of responsibility and freedom deconstructs the notion of self as an organism endowed with a will. Conceiving responsibility as our ability to respond to another person, and freedom as part of the ontological structure of beings (not as the determination of the subject toward objects), leaves us to wonder at the being of this other self as it were, to see language as cradling both self and others. Authentic reading removes from us the epistemological attitude toward others, to “know” them by assigning properties or traits to them, to understand them only as similar to or different from ourselves. In authentic reading, we lay bare the humanity of self and others, and in so doing, begin to desire to respectfully care for, not solicitously protect, others as creators of meaning by engaging with them, granting us a unique understanding of Being that urges us to become our own unique selves.

Chapter 2: The Grammar of the Inexpressible and the Indeterminacy of Meaning

Quaestio mihi factus sum.

Augustine

The most important questions are concealed.

Wittgenstein

In recent decades, Wittgenstein has enjoyed great cachet among philosophers, literary critics, and theorists of religion.¹ Many of these thinkers assume, as David Stern demonstrates, that there is a determinant philosophy within the pages of Wittgenstein's publications, those produced both during his lifetime and posthumously.² A resume of

¹For recent examples, see David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Marjorie Perloff, *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), and Dewi Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). Stern's book is yet one more look, albeit a highly readable and engaging one, at Wittgenstein's *PI*. For her part, Perloff claims that Wittgenstein's writing style and philosophical "method" is in step with that of his modernist poet contemporaries. Phillips, a well-known philosopher of religion, uses Wittgenstein's work to explain that religious beliefs entail neither realism or non-realism.

²Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 31, 43 discusses thinkers like Cora Diamond who, he claims, think that Wittgenstein had a definite philosophical program, namely to invalidate philosophical systems and philosophical thinking while endorsing something like "ordinary language." In David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20-21, he cites *PI* 130 as inspiration for the following: "Wittgenstein emphasized that his description of 'language-games'—real or imaginary ways of using language—were not intended as preliminary studies for a systematic account of language, first approximations to something more systematic" (20). He continues: "[T]he point of his use of language-games is precisely to subvert any such systematic conception [as the "essential similarities between propositions and pictures"]. [...] [I]t is no failing of the calculus that it does not capture every aspect of the objects to which it is applied" (20-21). Cora Diamond does seem to support Stern's assessment of her work. She claims that the point of Wittgenstein's work is in "not laying down general philosophical conditions" for language (20-21), and that Wittgenstein wanted his reader's to come away thinking that philosophy as a type of inquiry was an "illusion" (70). She asserts that Wittgenstein was not a verificationist, for this would be looking outside language in order to "anchor" it, and consequently he was not a communitarian, since communal practices cannot verify and substantiate language use. See Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 20-21, 70. John McDowell, like Stern, claims that Wittgenstein did not need to invent elaborate

non-analytical readings of Wittgenstein (those focused on the “later” Wittgenstein) emphasizes our inability to know anything with certainty because of the epistemological boundaries put in place by our particular society or “language game.” The general conclusion is that each language game, and therefore each culture, has a different “definition” of truth, one that functions well within that society and therefore is insulated against critiques from players of other language games. This interpretation of Wittgenstein has proved quite useful for critiquing universalizing or essentializing worldviews, including Enlightenment thought and scientific reductionism, as well as for promoting the validity of pluralism, for example, the possibility and prevalence of

philosophical arguments against “incoherent” ideas, for incoherence calls for “clearing up,” not an argument. He contends that the “form of life” concept was not Wittgenstein’s way of forming a “positive” philosophy, but a way of showing that human life already includes meaning and understanding. Forms of life or “customs” are not the result of “training” (behavioristic), but are the understanding itself, not the “interpretation” of something else “seen.” See John McDowell, “Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 272, 277. Duncan Richter uses Stern’s work to assert that “Wittgenstein’s work is not directed towards or against other people’s views. Rather, Wittgenstein...is engaged in a struggle with his own intuitions and convictions” (163). He goes on to say that Wittgenstein was not interested in “accusing” actual persons of “confusion,” and if he were to do so, the accused would have to “agree” with the diagnosis. He believes this is the point of Wittgenstein claiming his work to be simply a “mirror” for the reader. Richter thinks that Wittgenstein’s philosophical “descendants” have taken personal remarks as “real” philosophy, and that philosophy should not be a “critical apparatus” for testing others’ views. See Duncan Richter, “Missing the Entire Point: Wittgenstein and Religion,” *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 37, no. 2 (2001): 163, 165, 168. D. F. Pears also believes that Wittgenstein did not consider philosophical theories successful, but only because they did not have “the empirical basis that gives science its explanatory power” (3). Pears assumes that Wittgenstein thought that words had to retain their “ordinary meaning” and that philosophy “twisted” such meaning. Pears’ Wittgenstein seems to be a full-fledged communitarian. See D. F. Pears, “Literalism and Imagination: Wittgenstein’s Deconstruction of Traditional Philosophy,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 1 (2002): 3, 8. In order to show the far reach of Wittgenstein’s philosophy, I offer this last example from an extremely biased evangelical theologian, M. W. Nicholson, who claims that Wittgenstein had a “propensity for obscurity” and is not sure whether his philosophy “is genuinely useful for evangelical theology.” He questions “whether the relativistic and solipsistic tendencies in Wittgenstein’s later philosophy provide any solid basis for a critical hermeneutic” (617). Nicholson assumes that Wittgenstein had a philosophical “program” that he either successfully or unsuccessfully explained. For my part, I think Wittgenstein has much to offer regarding the reading of sacred texts, though such deplorable misreadings of Wittgenstein as Nicholson’s would mask that. See M. W. Nicholson, “Abusing Wittgenstein: The Misuse of the Concept of Language Games in Contemporary Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39, no. 4 (1996): 617-18.

multiple interpretations of the same text, especially those texts imbued with authority by their readers, such as religious texts. It is not my wish to enter here into an argument that such an interpretation of Wittgenstein, one that considers his work to be an endorsement for communitarianism or skepticism regarding our epistemological access to truth or “the things in themselves” (a rather Kantian reading of Wittgenstein), is a misreading of his work, as I think it is.³ Wittgenstein’s work focuses instead on trying to untangle the confusions and misconceptions that lead to certain ultimata typical of Western philosophy, namely those standard “genera” of philosophy to which we feel we must adhere given how we answer certain questions: relativism, solipsism, idealism, realism, nominalism, etc.⁴

³As already cited in note 2, see Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind*, 70 for arguments why Wittgenstein could not be a communitarian, given his notion of language and meaning. Stern argues that the communitarian view can be reduced to a “private language” and fall to the criticisms of the “private language argument.” Alternatively, if one endorses that a community can arbitrarily create rules of language use, nothing prevents an individual from doing so, and “private languages” are allowed, the very things communitarians were trying to avoid by citing Wittgenstein’s “private language argument.” See Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, 181n88. Charles Altieri claims that Wittgenstein was an enemy of solipsism and skepticism, arguing that such views are the result of placing a “representation” between the self and “certain direct knowledge.” Representations can only be explained via other representations, the result being a denial of knowledge or that the self alone has knowledge and that others’ knowledge is not certain. See Charles Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory,” *Modern Language Notes* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1401.

⁴Examples of this include: *BB*, 48, where Wittgenstein shows us that when we view the world only from the perspective of personal experience, “what we know seems to lose a good deal of its value, reliability, and solidity.” In other words, trying to apply the notion of “personal experience” to every context leads us to denigrate that point of view as simply “subjective” and not “objective.” Wittgenstein is not making the point here that “personal experience” is “always” subjective and therefore unreliable, but instead that such a denigration of personal experience arises from trying to explain the causes of what we think, know, or believe from that perspective only; at *PI* 383, Wittgenstein expressly denies he is a nominalist and explains the error of nominalism; at *PI* 402, Wittgenstein characterizes the incoherence of the arguments used by idealists, solipsists, and realists; although *PI* 436 probably concerns “traditional” metaphysics (as hinted at by the quotation from Augustine), I think Wittgenstein’s critiquing of those philosophers who think language’s purpose is to capture the present moment, a task at which it “fails,” can be equally applied to post-structuralists like Derrida; invoking the *Theaetetus*, *PI* 518 questions the foundations of both realism and the correspondence theory of truth; *OC* 527 also questions the actuality of “real” substantives, such as color, since the claim that something has a certain color does not imply doubt or knowledge; finally, at *OC*

By adhering to Wittgenstein's own thinking that the meaning of a word is its use, I can help clarify and substantiate the view I defend, which is that reading is a sharing of discourse between reader and writer, and that meaning-creation is an imaginative activity. Wittgenstein's conception of meaning foregrounds language as a human practice that itself entails the importance of communicants and contexts. Following Wittgenstein, since meaning is not the product of some "inner" mental mechanism nor the identifying of a correct correspondence of a word to an object (regardless of how we conceive of that object, whether it be "physical" or "abstract"), meaning, and *a fortiori* language, implies an encounter with another person and the use of imagination in engaging contexts that are dynamic and cannot be "known" a priori. Through this imaginative engagement with others, language grows, as do possibilities for meaning. Reading a text presents to us one more way of practicing this encounter and facing new possibilities of interpretation, but these possibilities themselves depend on authentically hearing another's discourse and facing the inexpressible, that is, the realization that authentic meanings cannot be created prior to that hearing. I will explore more fully throughout this chapter Wittgenstein's ideas regarding meaning and language, and how they contribute to a "hermeneutics" of reading; at the same time, I will show how, in our attempt to turn a deaf ear to others, we impose a worldview (a coherent system of beliefs that determine all possible meanings, a doctrine or dogma) on and impute certain beliefs to discourse, rendering the text a mere

569, like those sections in the *PI* regarding "private" language, Wittgenstein denies what he calls "inner experience" can give us something like knowledge, thereby denying the putative grounds of solipsism or relativism. In a similar vein, Phillips says that "for Wittgenstein, realism and non-realism are equally confused...In short, realism is not coherently expressible." See Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, 34.

object among others and crippling our ability to create an authentic self that shares discourse with other persons. As briefly explained in the introduction, this equating of reading with meaning-creation leads me to interchange “interpret” and its morphological variants with “read,” if for no other reason than to alleviate repetition of a single word. But this does not mean I consider this dissertation to be about that method or practice called in the humanities “hermeneutics,” neither the “art” of interpretation debated, for example, in arguments regarding the reading of religious texts in seminary settings, where the meaning of the text has already been assumed, nor the method of “philosophical” hermeneutics in the spirit of, for example, Gadamer. I am deeply suspicious of a “science” of interpretation, as Gadamer was, and if this dissertation has anything to say regarding philosophical hermeneutics, it would be only to clear the ground on which such a hermeneutics stands. Accordingly, I will often use the word “interpretation” as closer in meaning to my understanding of Heidegger’s use of *Auslegung*. Alternatively, one could see my use of “read” as similar to the colloquial usage where “to read” often means “to interpret.” We “read” (interpret) each other’s facial expressions, behavior, etc., or seek clarification by asking how someone else “reads” the situation, e.g., “How do you read what he said at the meeting?”

Part I. Reading, Language Games, and Meaning

Nothing is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than constructing fictitious ones.

Wittgenstein

Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.

Wittgenstein

Wittgenstein's concept of the language game allows us to understand that language provides contours in which meaning can arise but do not thereby limit meaning, that meaning in language is not simply the result of a finite set of definitions. Using chess as an example, as Wittgenstein himself does in *PI*, though toward a different end, different chess pieces can only move in certain directions and for a certain number of spaces.⁵ Yet this does not dictate which pieces will be moved (outside of a pawn making the first move), nor does it mean that every game of chess will be identical, though every game will be played similarly. What moves I make, which strategy I adopt, is actually dependent on my opponent—it is not a pure whim of my own, though my opponent does not necessarily know which piece, and therefore what strategy, I will ultimately choose. And here the game analogy must end, for the entire point of real chess is to give your opponent no more moves at all, whereas in language another move is always possible. The analogy, then, gives us what I think Wittgenstein wanted us to see: the notion of a bounded yet infinite series, where each move depended not only on rules, but on the opponent's actions, a game that by definition cannot be played alone (although it is true

⁵For example, *PI* 31. Although as a caveat, I should stress, as I think Wittgenstein himself does, that the “game” concept cannot capture every facet of language use, nor exhaust the innumerable environments in which meaning arises. Also see the earlier cited Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, 20-1. Opposed to my and Stern's view, Roy Harris believes that Wittgenstein was promoting a “positive” philosophy of language based on the game-rules concept. He then accuses Wittgenstein of avoiding certain issues, especially compared to Saussure. Harris argues that “the whole point of the chess analogy is that the rules *do* determine in advance all the possible moves” (91). Such a reading turns Wittgenstein into nothing more than a behaviorist, that is, meaning is determined by linguistic input and output, not by creative thinking and use. See Roy Harris, *Language, Saussure, and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words* (London: Routledge, 1990), 90-1.

that not all games have specific rules, but simply specific practices).⁶ Here we have the seed of some of Wittgenstein's other imaginative linguistic scenarios: since we cannot play the game alone, the idea of a private language with private meanings (alternatively, private uses) becomes nonsensical; the meanings of words or propositions only make sense when they are "played," i.e., there are no meanings of words prior to use. We even have a reason for creativity: there are better and worse strategies in playing the game, and the spur to that creativity is in the limitations of how the "pieces" can be moved, just as writing in conformity with the rules of, for example, sonnet formation can actually inspire creative workmanship, not preclude, hinder, or dampen it. So the game analogy is indeed

⁶Here we must once again recognize that meaning in language is not dependent upon rules, even when language is considered a game. At *PI* 80, Wittgenstein warns us of just this, that we can use words though we lack rules for each and every use. At *BB* 25, he says: "For remember that in general we don't use language according to strict rules—it hasn't been taught us by means of strict rules, either." He goes on to claim that we are often at a loss to supply "rules of usage" when asked, but that this is not a weakness of language. Words do not have "real definitions" whereby we could list every use, i.e., one cannot fully exhaust a word's meanings prior to discourse. Similarly, Stern argues that context is a "pre-condition" of "grasping the rule." See Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, 30. Paul Livingston argues likewise, for following a rule is "context-specific," and "appealing" to something more "metaphysical" does not succeed in explaining the "actual practice" of following a rule. See Paul Livingston, "Thinking and Being: Heidegger and Wittgenstein on Machination and Lived-Experience," *Inquiry* 46, no. 3 (2003): 343. John Churchill explains how "aspect recognition is a central concept...of the paradox of rule following" (153). He uses Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit example to show that our explanation of the picture is usually an "inner interpretation" of something "external" (the lines themselves). Wittgenstein denies this is so, for then we would be unable to "specify" the lines themselves that make up the shape. We are instead "struck by the relation between what we see and other objects" (154). In other words, "aspects" are not "properties" of an object. We see the lines before us in "relation" to rabbits or ducks. He concludes that, just as rules are "underdetermined" in that anything can be shown to be "in accordance" with a rule in question, interpretations alone cannot "determine" a meaning. Rule-following and recognizing aspects are both "shared" responses/behaviors, and the practice of language lets us know if we have something "wrong." See John Churchill, "Rat and Mole's Epiphany of Pan: Wittgenstein on Seeing Aspects and Religious Belief," *Philosophical Investigations* 21, no. 2 (1998): 153-4, 156. Peter King takes the completely opposite view and argues that Wittgenstein, or at least his followers, have given us the "contemporary" view that understanding comes from rule-following within a community. See Peter King, "Augustine on the Impossibility of Teaching," *Metaphilosophy* 29, no. 3 (1998): 179-80. David Charles also believes that Wittgenstein's central concern is with "techniques" and rules. See David Charles, "Wittgenstein's Builders and Aristotle's Craftsmen," in *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays in Honour of David Pears*, ed. David Charles and William Child (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 54-5.

a useful one, and what remains is the need to explain how Wittgenstein's ideas, most of which are related to the concept of the language game, can be extended to the practice of reading and "finding" meaning when we read.

Prior to such explanation, however, I need to clarify how Wittgenstein's thinking has been misappropriated by some in their attempt to explain the implications of a word's meaning understood as its use in particular language games or contexts. A misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's concept of language, one which only conceives of games as rule-bound, may actually endorse a "literal" reading of texts and thereby negate meaning as use by ultimately claiming only one meaning is legitimate regardless of context, or, on the other hand, it may endorse a hermeneutic free-for-all where any meaning assigned to a text is completely valid within its own idiom, that is, within the language game of the particular reader, a practice that also ignores the context made clear by the text. To obtain a clearer understanding of Wittgenstein's ideas, it is important to see the genesis of such misconceptions, for they are misconceptions about language which Wittgenstein's own work attempts to clear away.

The genesis of these misconceptions regarding Wittgenstein's thought begins with certain assumptions like the following. In the interests of safeguarding the multiplicity of interpretations and being sensitive to different understandings of "reality," a reader grants that every reading of a text can lead to a unique meaning being assigned to that text, and so in following Wittgenstein's general condition that meaning in language not be bound by a universal set of rules that applies to every context, it would seem that every interpretation of a text is indeed a valid or "correct" one (such is the general conclusion of

reading Wittgenstein as a cultural relativist or endorsing communitarianism). If the practice of reading is further misunderstood to be reducible to the affirmation or discovery of beliefs, this “validity” of all interpretations is then often extended to the belief systems that are thought to correspond to those interpretations. But I would claim this notion of reading mis-uses Wittgenstein’s understanding of language, for it must assume that either meaning is virtually known prior to reading the text (the meaning of the text is an affirmation of beliefs already known or held by the reader) or that the meaning of the text can be reduced to one or a set of “true” (correct, in that they “agree” with reality or are considered to be morally “correct”) beliefs (within the text is a set of beliefs that the reader must discover). For example, with regard to religious texts, orthodox readings reduce such literature to a search for beliefs that by definition are exclusive of other voices (interpretations). Such a reading strategy demands that either meaning is known a priori or that the text has only one, unique (discoverable) meaning. The concept of the game, then, helps uncover a real confusion that leads to misunderstanding the concept itself, namely, regardless of whether one assumes that a language game must imply either a univocal and universal meaning for a text or that innumerable meanings are equally valid, the desire to secure a worldview (an all-encompassing view of Being and beings that ends the interpretative practice by supplying ultimate meanings) makes both assumptions amount to the same thing: one meaning alone can be considered “real” and others effectively ignored. Such readers want to play the game with someone else, but *exactly* the same way *every* time, that is, annihilate the game while endorsing it and reducing it to a community of orthodoxies that each have

their own set of (private) rules, an incoherence a proper understanding of Wittgenstein helps to reveal.

Furthermore, those who misunderstand Wittgenstein in this way are actually attempting to affirm that the actions they claim to be based on their interpretations of a text are also valid and unable to be critiqued or found in error by those who do not share their interpretation.⁷ A central point of this dissertation, however, is that reading a text cannot “cause” beliefs to occur, nor any actions attributed to those beliefs, and yet reading having this power is exactly what the aforementioned readers would have us assent to by reducing the meaning of a text to a set of beliefs that entail certain necessary accompanying actions. Readers whose reading practice remains, even if not overtly, a search for the unique reading (the only “right” reading) may profess the game model allows us to have multiple interpretations that are equally viable, but often use this “equality” as it were to focus only on their own “supported” interpretation to the exclusion of others. These readers interpret Wittgenstein as supporting their claim that the game concept of language makes their particular language game (and therefore beliefs) sacrosanct, their particular interpretation of a sacred text untouchable by everyone else, a misreading of Wittgenstein I return to later in this chapter. Such readers assume a linear model of reading, i.e., one meaning must necessarily become the only or “real”

⁷Wittgenstein himself makes remarks that focus on the impasse this type of interpretation leads to. At *OC* 609, he says that calling something “wrong” is to use one’s own “language-game as a base from which to *combat* theirs [the language game of the people we claim to be wrong]” (original italics). Two paragraphs later, at 611, he declares: “Where two principles really do meet which cannot be reconciled to one another, then each man declares the other a fool and a heretic.”

meaning, a meaning that is translated into a set of beliefs or worldview which is understood to proscribe and prescribe certain actions.

A relativist or communitarian approach to Wittgenstein's thought, namely, an understanding of Wittgenstein as declaring all meanings equally valid, a validity that effectively erases the context the text assumes and helps create, thereby dispenses with meaning as a "function" of a particular use, the very concept Wittgenstein was attempting to demonstrate to his own readers. In this sense, relativism of meanings ignores use and context in the same manner as the correspondence theory of meaning, a theory Wittgenstein also goes to great lengths to dismantle by showing its inability to capture the practice of language. Such is the confusion and incoherence of that mis-reading of Wittgenstein which asserts that every interpretation of a text is as good as every other and forms its own inviolable and sacrosanct language game, a description that can also be applied to so-called "private" languages, yet another understanding of meaning in language that Wittgenstein helps reveal to be incoherent and "nonsensical."

In examining why certain readers can be obsessed with validating (not simply explaining them, but somehow proving their "correctness," i.e., "truth" or "goodness") interpretations in whatever way, we should consider how the plurality of interpretations seems to present a problem to them. For readers who use Wittgenstein's game analogy to assert that rules of interpretation exist such that one meaning supercedes all others, it seems that hermeneutical multiplicity can only be a "problem" if they assume that multiplicity implies that what they consider the goal of reading and interpreting a text (validation and correctness of beliefs) has been missed, correctness here being equated

with truth as a kind of agreement (howsoever defined) with “reality.” Readers who understand Wittgenstein to be supporting a practice of reading that produces a universal meaning ignore that his thinking implies that the contexts of readers (and reading) are varied and numerous, and so interpretations, being founded on contexts, will be equally varied and numerous. Instead, Wittgenstein warns us against our obsession with generality, our abhorrence of the singular and unique case, which leads to forms of both realism and relativism by, briefly put, assuming that all instances of a word or groups of related words correspond to or share something in common with an object that is (1) real and can be discovered, defined, etc. and serves as *the* meaning of the word or words, or (2) assuming that the plethora of divergent uses makes it impossible to *know* absolutely what is real or true, so skeptically concludes that all references (meanings) are valid and viable—but this skepticism never questions that truth should *ideally* be some form of correspondence or agreement between language and thing and that therefore language is in essence epistemological and primarily relates knowledge of things.⁸ Accordingly, we should not think of language as a purely technical tool of description that fits all situations, the way a scientific theorem or law is ideally intended to predict activity regardless of circumstances. To be suspicious of the multiplicity of textual interpretations is already to assume that multiplicity harbors error, while to think that any interpretation is as good as any other is still to be obsessed with correctness by annihilating any chance of error. Thinking that a theory is necessary in order to validate the correctness of multiple (or just one) interpretations is already foreign to

⁸BB 18.

Wittgenstein's philosophical approach, and it is therefore important for readers of Wittgenstein to understand how he thinks his approach to language and meaning clears away normative relativism as a viable outlook, an epistemic or "truth-value" relativism that Wittgenstein thinks is as confused as realism, solipsism, idealism, etc.

Wittgenstein's ultimate goal is to call into question the very kind of thinking that makes relativism, realism, or any other kind of "-ism" feel like a "move" that *must* be made in the language game; indeed, they are not moves at all but language "idling." For Wittgenstein, the need to make such a choice, to end up somewhere where one feels comfortable adopting such a system of thought, is the great harm of "philosophy" itself; that what goes by that name is an utter confusion that needs to be cleared up.⁹

⁹For excellent arguments to this effect, see Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, which for the most part argues that Wittgenstein's method was a "skeptical" one, one that engaged every possible system of philosophy in order to question their "solutions" to various problems, and that Wittgenstein was not concerned with promoting one way of looking at the world, language, action, etc. Seeburger throughout volume II of Francis F. Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1984) also denies the "practical" use of philosophy (the "traditional" notion of philosophy in which it can tell us how to think, what to believe, what counts as "real," "truth," etc.), often claiming or otherwise revealing his indebtedness to Wittgenstein. The arguments over whether Wittgenstein advocated or opposed skepticism are many. Altieri believes, citing Stanley Cavell as a source, that Wittgenstein allows us to focus on our commitments, and that *contra* accusations of relativism or solipsism, "what is deeply personal is not therefore subjective and arbitrary." See Altieri, "Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory," 1405. Edward Minar believes that Wittgenstein "opposed" skepticism, and that "far from being a difficulty that must be faced in the name of intellectual rigor and methodological scrupulousness, skepticism presents a symptom of our way of inhabiting our condition" (37). He goes on to discuss the problem of assuming "the authority of normative practice," which forces a choice between dogmatism (the communitarian) or simply "mysteriousness" (it is simply what happens, or "God says" etc.). Posed with the problem of authority, "reality" seems to recede, and we cannot be "assured" the "objectivity of [our] own perspective" (38). Minar claims that for Wittgenstein, there is no division between the "we" and the "world," and that claiming a "form of life" as the basis of authority makes Wittgenstein fall to skepticism by assuming it. Minar argues that Wittgenstein's real point is that "necessities" and "agreements" make no sense outside a form of life, so a demand for external authority is nonsensical. We *can* question the "we," but the we "to whom we can talk" (40). Skepticism is therefore "an expression of dissatisfaction with the human" (ibid.). See Edward H. Minar, "Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Skepticism," *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 9 (2001): 37-40. Stephen Mulhall argues that "we set up the world and its objects in such a way that we set upon them; skeptical doubts assail us because we have assailed the independent reality of things by decomposing and thereby deposing them" (303). Citing Heidegger reading Nietzsche, Mulhall claims that our revenge on a "reality" that causes us to

Wittgenstein demonstrates how the kind of relativism referred to earlier is language gone “on holiday” by first revealing the inherent instability in such thought, namely that every relativist position allows for and increases the possibility of solipsism by its claim that any truth or conduct is as “good” as another, which in turn elevates the ego-subject as the most important entity among all other entities by localizing all powers of judgment in that subject and so implying that such judgment by the subject is somehow the “goal” of thinking or speaking. Such localization virtually ignores, if not questions the existence of, other minds and thereby “privatizes” the self.

The “proof” of the nonsensicality of a private language is Wittgenstein’s way of demonstrating that solipsism is not a move that can be made in the language game.¹⁰ The

suffer is skepticism. See Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 303. Stanley Cavell famously argues that insisting on “criteria” we have already learned and know (e.g., what pain is) is skepticism, a “disappointment with human knowledge” (44). Philosophy is a “balancing act” between “faith” in such knowledge and skepticism of it, the goal being “sanity.” He goes on to say that “our relation to the world as a whole, or to others in general, is not one of knowing, where knowing construes itself as being certain” (45). Cavell thinks that the skeptic must now try to explain why her “discovery” of a lack of certainty is any kind of “discovery” at all. Cavell then goes on to nuance his idea of skepticism as “any view which takes the existence of the world to be a problem of knowledge,” including realism as a form of skepticism (46). There is a “truth” to skepticism then in that it is correct we can never be certain—certainty is not part of our being human, and language is “only human.” See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 44-47. Martin Warner echoes Cavell in claiming that skepticism is a way of “transcending finitude.” See Martin Warner, “Literature, Truth, and Logic,” *Philosophy* 74, no. 287 (1999): 48. Finally, from a critical point of view, at least with regard to Wittgenstein’s *OC*, Iakovos Vasiliou argues that Wittgenstein’s explanation “appears to be one that implies some sort of radical relativism,” but such relativism may not really be there. See Iakovos Vasiliou, “Wittgenstein, Religious Belief, and *On Certainty*,” in *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis (New York: Routledge, 2004), 47.

¹⁰According to Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 181n7, the “private language argument” is traditionally considered to run from section 243 to section 315, though this term never actually appears in the *PI* or in any of Wittgenstein’s other papers. As Stern points out on 180, Kripke considered the “argument” to have “begun” at section 202. For his part, at page 183, Stern claims that Wittgenstein was not a communitarian or constructivist and was therefore not endorsing through the “private language argument” the need and validity of a social confirmation of meaning and/or truth. Explanations concerning the PLA are as or almost as numerous as those regarding Wittgenstein’s skepticism. Altieri thinks that the PLA denies some kind of “verification which exists beneath or behind the

so-called “private language argument” (PLA) denies that language and meaning can be based solely on some internal mechanism by showing that it makes no sense to speak of a practice or rule that is applied only once or in the mind of one person alone (which would thereby obliterate the very concept of a rule or practice, for both imply application to multiple contexts and multiple users). The advocate of a PL, however, wants to show that at least she has access to meanings even if others do not, but Wittgenstein demonstrates that not only does rule-following require a practice with others, but that even the desire to grasp meaning according to internal rules alone already presupposes a desire to communicate with those others. That is, any notion of communication presumes a “with” in that something (information, emotion, etc.) is to be shared or relayed to others. Following Wittgenstein, purely “internal” conversations with oneself could be relayed to the “outside” world and still make perfect sense, since the internal conversation is already

utterance, for example in the speaker’s intentions or in the intuition or sensation referred to,” leading to a different idea of consciousness that disallows any need for the person to be a “mediator” between “signs and meaning.” See Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory,” 1400. Garth Hallett simplifies the PLA, claiming that Wittgenstein meant to show that establishing personal signs for “private” sensations was “incoherent,” not because of a potential for forgetfulness, but because “paying attention” to something “inward” does not give that thing meaning, for we do not know in what sort of “game” (use) we will “play” it. See Garth Hallett, *A Companion to Wittgenstein's "Philosophical Investigations"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), 338. Iris Murdoch makes a similar argument: “if we were to hear and see words uttered inwardly we might wonder what they meant.” She goes on to make a critical error, I think, in claiming that “language and thought are not co-extensive.” See Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1997), 34-5. Cavell thinks the PLA neither concerns a “failure of imagination” nor the impossibility of a private language. Instead, it is meant to “discredit” views that deny the “essential shareability” of language, to show that the skeptic can never be “skeptical enough.” See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 344, 353. In an earlier work, Stern claims that a private language is nonsensical in that if privacy is supposed to mean what it normally does, then no problem is presented, for we can all conceive of a “private” language in these terms. If “private” is supposed to mean something very unique and special, neither we nor the private linguist can judge it, for it is not “parallel” to any language we do use. Consequently, “the private act of ostension fails to introduce a term in the first place” and “we can only explain how a language works to someone who already knows how to speak.” (182). The private linguist does not have this “technique” for her language, and therefore no context, no use, no meaning. See Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language*, 181-2.

modeled on two speakers. Even if I consider myself the other person as it were, speaking (and thinking, Wittgenstein would say) reveals a desire to “express” or verbalize the self to that other. In short, the advocate of the PL desires communicability (in that she wants to convince herself as if she were another that the meanings she conceives are correct and stable) but already presumes incommunicability (for language is assumed to be radically isolated), a contradiction that makes nonsense of her thinking. On the other hand, Wittgenstein should not be understood as claiming that meaning is secured by “externality” or objective agreement, as if meanings were objects waiting to be attached to words, or vice versa. For Wittgenstein, the language game contains only “yardsticks” of varying concepts of objectivity, yardsticks the use of which is part of learning the game.¹¹

¹¹Wittgenstein discusses how truth enters into our language in various works, but the most pointed seem to occur in *OC*: for examples, see *PI* 136, *OC* 83, 94, 152, 205, 403, and 599. At *CV* 26, he calls that “ideal” to which we compare other ideas or objects for the present moment a “yardstick,” but the German actually translates as “measure,” “ruler,” or “criterion.” If we begin to think everything must “conform” to this ideal, we become dogmatists. Likewise, Richard Amesbury advises us that “the standards for deciding between true and false hypotheses are themselves internal to the practices in question” (66). He also advises against a Kantian reading of Wittgenstein, that “real” truth exists but is “inaccessible,” that we can have “rational,” but possibly “false,” beliefs: “epistemic practices are not...lenses or ‘conceptual frameworks’ that prevent us from recognizing the truth about the world, but the very contexts within which the distinction between truth and falsity can meaningfully be applied. [...] The reality to which our beliefs are answerable is a reality the *meaning* of which is constituted by the epistemic practices in question” (68, original italics). See Richard Amesbury, “Has Wittgenstein Been Misunderstood by Wittgensteinian Philosophers of Religion?” *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no. 1 (2003): 66, 68. Brian Clack denies that Wittgenstein had a “static” view of truth, reminding us that he opposed the three “standard” theories of truth: correspondence, coherence, or pragmatism. See Brian R. Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40 (August 1996): 57. Cavell also denies that truth can occur outside contexts, that a “theory of universals” does not explain language in that it assumes words can occur outside any context, that words can occur “only once.” He demonstrates that “concepts” are explained through the “various uses” of a word, that words “recur,” and that listing every context is impossible given this recurrence, a new context and use. See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 78, 188. Christopher Kirwan echoes this sentiment by denying the “type-token” distinction, that there is such a thing as an “inert” word that acquires meaning from being “put to use.” He calls this the “speech-thought isomorphism,” that thought is a kind of “word” that precedes the “uttered” word. His ultimate conclusion is that words are not signs since the same word in two different instances does not stand for something “common.” See Christopher Kirwan, “Augustine’s

The concept of the language game, which we have seen implies others, can however complicate the possibility of creativity, which in terms of this dissertation is the poiesis of meaning effected through reading a text. This possible complication in understanding the range and origin of the creative imagination from within the language game can be placed under the brief heading “historical semantics,” without however drawing any connection to the formal sub-field with that name in the field of linguistics. This interest in the past arises because it seems logical to assume that given the use (meaning) of a word, new uses (meanings) of the same word will build on the former ones, and so meaning must therefore have a history. Otherwise, one could argue, how could the game continue to be played? The rules or practices that regulate the movement of the “pieces” have to possess some semblance of permanence or else the game ceases to exist as a game. The problem can then be posed thus: how can an author or reader “invent” new meanings or new words given how a word has been used historically and the fossilizing effect of culture and tradition? Language undergoes constant evolution, yet Wittgenstein’s game metaphor seems to imply that moves in the game acquire a kind of permanence.¹² And indeed they must if communication continues to occur, if a text

Philosophy of Language,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. E. Stump and N. Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 198, 200, 203. From a different perspective on the importance of context, Kevin Schilbrack discusses Donald Davidson’s theory of language. Davidson claims that “identifying something without interpreting it” is not possible (335). In this way, Davidson denies a certain kind of correspondence theory, for there are no “isolated” and “neutral facts” to which truth corresponds. However, as Schilbrack points out, this does not stop Davidson from establishing meaning as a form of correct reference, (what Heidegger would call “truth as correctness,”) and Davidson is still in pursuit of a modified correspondence theory of truth. See Kevin Schilbrack, “The Study of Religious Belief after Donald Davidson,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14, no. 3-4 (2002): 335, 337-39.

¹²Taking a decidedly antagonistic approach, Harris claims that Wittgenstein does not “satisfactorily deal” with the notion of “linguistic innovation.” See Harris, *Language, Saussure, and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words*, 52. In this respect, David Klemm gives voice to the “philosophical must”: “There must

written a century before can still be read with understanding. However, Wittgenstein himself shows that he is committed to more than games and their explanation in that he thinks that any system of rules, as is implied by the game analogy, is an inadequate comprehensive account of the nature of language and meaning. In an attempt to extend Wittgenstein's remarks on language games beyond what he himself says or implies, one can ask if the game analogy can account for both permanence and change in language.

The concern raised by the question of a history of meaning is indeed a profound one, for underlying all its concern for language is its concern for new *thoughts*. Someone approaching the game analogy for the first time could assume that if the game cannot account for the fact of linguistic change and creativity, then there must be something outside the game which becomes the criterion of meaning, something with the sheen of permanent truth, something immutable toward which we direct our thoughts in an ever-tightening spiral of keener understanding. When this concern with the history of meaning is coupled with the assumption that Wittgenstein's game analogy cannot really account for linguistic creativity because of its supposedly rigid rules of play, an implicit argument for realism arises that claims that meaning in language does not really depend on use or

be a depth to the structure of human understanding that does not change, but rather persists through time and makes it possible for human understanding to recognize the fact of change in human understanding." See David E. Klemm, "Depth Hermeneutic and the Literary Work of Art: Religious Tradition, Hermeneutic Theory and Nihilism," in *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeffrey F. Keuss (Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 80. This idea of permanence seems very close to Aristotle's concept of the "soul" or "psyche."

convention as much as it does on a “higher” permanent reality that has nothing at all to do with language.¹³

¹³Such are the arguments of the analytic and logical positivist schools of philosophy, most of which assume words are signs corresponding or representing something else and that language is a type of “code.” The following is of course not an exhaustive overview of such thinkers, but serves as examples of those views of language Wittgenstein (and Heidegger and I) opposes (indeed, any “theory” of language is already a move that will result in what Wittgenstein calls “nonsense”). Most of these theories take as their starting point the work of Gottlob Frege, who considered truth to be a function of reference. For him, words corresponded to things and were merely “signs.” He famously divided “sense” from “reference,” a word’s sense not being the object (to use his own example, the image of the moon in a telescope is the “sense,” while the actual moon is the “object”). With regard to texts, Frege considered multiple interpretations to be the result of readers’ “subjective ideas” that could never replicate the author’s intentions, which could never be recovered. See Gottlob Frege, “Sense and Reference,” in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 57, 60-1, 63-4. W. V. O. Quine believed that we first learn words for “things nearest to hand” (1). Meaning is primarily “stimulus meaning,” what the human being responds to “physically,” but the “terms” and “references” are “conventional.” For him, all languages are “theories.” See W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 1, 53, 76. Even though J. L. Austin denied that meanings could be secured outside context, he still held to a theory of reference and that such reference depended primarily on knowledge. See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 143. H. P. Grice believed that meaning was secured through authorial intent, but that the author of an utterance must also intend that the audience recognize the intention, although he himself was dissatisfied with this description. He claimed that the audience “controls” the intended “effects” by looking for “evidence” of a “proper interpretation.” See H. P. Grice, “Meaning,” in *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 217, 221. Saul Kripke took up the notion of referents, claiming that a referent is that which “uniquely satisfies the conditions of an utterance” (26). This led him to his notion of names as the only necessary thing to achieve reference (names as “rigid designators”), not knowledge, *contra* Austin. He claimed that things are not objects “behind” an assortment of qualities, as it were, and that names were not “unique descriptions” since we can use names without having or knowing a description. See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 26, 30, 48, 52, and 82. Karl-Otto Apel believes that Grice’s theory of intention is wrong because he does not explain well the “preconditions” of “shared communication.” He concludes by claiming that language fails to convey “the thing itself” and cannot achieve “real knowledge.” See Karl-Otto Apel, “Intention, Conventions, and Reference to Things: Meaning in Hermeneutics and the Analytic Philosophy of Language,” in *Karl-Otto Apel: Selected Essays*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Heights, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 70-1, 76-7. K. Donnellan nuances the notion of definite description by claiming there is “attributive use” (making an assertion about something) and “referential use” (that which permits the audience to “pick out” what is said to exist). Something can be said referentially without concern for attributes, so a reference can “fail” to fit the description but still be “true.” This allows for some things to be referred to that “defy” description. See K. Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions,” *Philosophical Review* 75, no. 3 (1966): 198, 203, 211. Dennis Stampe claims that “it is by virtue of the fact that certain properties of an object are causally related to certain properties of an expression that the latter refers to the former” (45). Essentially, utterances are “representations” of thoughts, and meaning is the result of a “cause.” See Dennis Stampe, “Toward a Causal Theory of Linguistic Representation,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 (1977): 45, 52-3. Clack explains the weakness of all such theories: such thinkers need the idea of description and truth to remain one thing (not “context dependent”), so that meaning and truth in language, regardless of “subject,” can be “unified” and “determinable.” If we agree with Wittgenstein and meaning is equivalent to use, analytic and positivist theories break down and cannot be sustained. See Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” 55.

Wittgenstein replies to this argument by pointing out that there are all sorts of games without “rigid” rules that determine play, that the game analogy is simply an analogy and not an exhaustive *theory* of language (as many of his supporters and critics assume), but an alternative response to the advocate of realism who thinks that changing meanings over time entails that the determination of a real object by which we measure those changes can be had by investigating the very history of meaning itself, that is, etymology. Linguistic evolution in all its forms (phonological, semantic, etc.) has long been considered fact by the modern science of linguistics, and diachronic linguistics is nothing more than simply the study of the evolution of languages, pictured as the classic (vaguely Aristotelian) branching tree, showing, for example, the Proto-Indo-European ramifying into Indo-European, itself constellating into Sanskrit, Vedic, Lithuanian, German, Greek, Latin, and so on, until we finally reach modern Romance languages, modern Slavic languages, as well as modern English. We can trace how an English verb has Scandinavian or Germanic roots, and trace those roots back further to a theoretical (because unattested) Indo-European form. This retrogression toward word origins is precisely how the field of historical semantics defines itself as an empirical science. But for the “everyday” speaker, knowing the etymology of a word does not automatically allow one to *use* it better, if at all. The architecture of the language game, however, is a complex network of interrelated uses, and one already has to be a player of the language game even to ask the etymological question, even to be able to follow the evolution of meaning that an etymology supplies. Quite frankly, it does not matter at all to our expertise as users of the language whether we know the etymology of a word or not, and

most who consider themselves fairly well educated can probably give the etymologies of only a handful of words. Yet words are used constantly, consistently, and “correctly,” in that communication “succeeds.”¹⁴

While etymology is certainly fascinating, and it certainly allows us to see what was important to different cultures (or our own) at different times as implied in the meanings (uses) of words,¹⁵ at its best, etymology will only give us the reasoning behind the metaphorical use of a term, for example, or indicate how a word that was simply descriptive of what was considered a physical object could be turned to more abstract uses, or vice versa. But etymology is not itself an explanation of, for example, the very process of inventing metaphors. Using etymologies to show how a metaphor became part of the language game assumes that we already know what a metaphor is, how one uses metaphors or “invents” them, how one, for example, compares physical description with abstract meanings such that if one’s nemesis is called a “pig,” there is no confusion for full players of the game between “actual” pigs and the person in question. In sum, we use our language perfectly well without knowing the etymology of a single word. When one claims that every word has a history of use, as if that were somehow to undercut Wittgenstein’s assertion that the meaning of a word is its use in the game by implying that

¹⁴Stern puts it this way: “For if we try to specify everything one has to know in order to understand statements...those sentences will also have to be understood, and that will presuppose further practical abilities on the part of the reader.[...]Part of the flexibility of our practices consists in their indeterminacy.” See David G. Stern, “Heraclitus’ and Wittgenstein’s River Images: Stepping Twice into the Same River,” *Monist* 74 (1991): 596.

¹⁵For a fascinating look at etymology and what it can reveal regarding knowledge and cultural values, see Owen Barfield, *History in English Words*, rev. ed. (Barrington, MA: Lindisfame Books, 2002), but note that on page 31, he claims meaning is “already there” to be discovered.

a fixed center regulates that history, one must assume that that history and fixed center must be remembered or held in mind every time the word is used, an activity which would be exactly equivalent to knowing the etymology of every word *before* using it and the lack of which can be empirically “observed” in that the majority of speakers use words correctly (succeed in communicating) while openly admitting their ignorance of etymology, first use, history, etc.¹⁶ The very practice of language defies such an assumption, and, as a further consequence, meaning being equivalent to use does not have to entail that words can only be used according to some convention or other communal agreement (a rule that would “fix” the meaning in place), as if uses were determined by rigid rules and external practices alone without any regard for the speaker as communicator. The concern with meaning having a history is then a misplaced one that very often leads to the promotion of a form of realism, seeing that it becomes a concern only if one already assumes meaning can only be “true” if it is reduced to a correspondence with one and only one object or concept as the criterion of meaning. The person who holds to such an idea of meaning feels the need to neutralize polysemy by explaining it away with a realist argument, the desire to retain a permanent kind of truth outside all context.

It is necessary to understand the oscillation between permanence and change in language without being confused by any notion of memory, of having consciously to remember all the meanings of every word in the language (or the putative objects to

¹⁶Wittgenstein clearly refutes that knowing a word’s history is integral to using that word correctly at *PI* 138-9.

which words correspond, as the realist argues) in order to create discourse. Wittgenstein helps us immensely here by supplying us with all sorts of examples of different language games, some that require more “expertise,” others that require nothing more than reflexive gestures. For example, the game discussed early in the *PI* at section 2, the “slab” game, seems to represent a very limited, but possible form of communication. Given two construction workers, both of whom know what they are doing, the rules of the game so to speak, a single word can act as a command. By simply yelling “Slab!” the one worker directs the other worker as to what is needed next and the other worker responds accordingly by placing the slab where it is wanted. Wittgenstein points out the important possibility that the word in this instance could simply be replaced by a gesture. This particular game is of course not the genesis of our everyday language game, nor is it the essence of all language games, but it demonstrates that in certain contexts language is nothing more than gesturing, a reflexive action. From this perspective, there is no need to “remember” what a certain gesture or facial expression “means” in order to know what someone intends or in order to know what one thinks about certain events, but one simply needs to be assimilated into a certain cultural group in order to know the “interpretation” of gestures and expressions, their proper application and their proper response.¹⁷ One already knows the game, and if the response one looks for does not attend the use of the gesture, that is when we know someone is in “error.” Either our gesture was misused and

¹⁷See the chapter “Being, Signifying, and ‘Representing’” in volume I of Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought* for good examples and explanations of the conventionalism of signs.

misplaced, or our respondent has not learned the “meaning” of such an expression yet, is not yet a full player of the game (they may be too young, from a different culture, etc.).

By this one example, Wittgenstein shows us that “remembering” the use of a word is sometimes equivalent to being able to engage in a practice, not to scanning a list of supposedly all the uses of a word in order to establish the “correct” one, either in general or for a particular circumstance. However, that gesture, that expression, can also be applied to all sorts of “new” situations, even imagined situations, and it need not be confined to the exact same conditions under which it was first applied, i.e., meaning not only has a history, it also has a future. This should not cause any consternation, for when one learns to hammer a nail, one does not think the hammer is to be used only for that one occasion or necessarily only for nails. One can even use the hammer as a doorstop. The question of history here actually confuses the issue, not that it does not have its place in other contexts such as an etymological study, by ignoring the creativity inherent in language. When we learn the meaning of a word, its use in a particular sentence, we learn far more than that particular context. The game supplies us not with rules so much as guidelines for the possibilities of the use of a word, in short, the game supplies us with a grammar. It is not a history of meaning that is needed in order to “know” a meaning and invent new ones, but the grammar supplied by the very use of words is what allows us to be creative with language. For Wittgenstein, that “grammar” is the structure of the language game itself.

Those concerned with memory and the history of meaning, however, are also voicing what seems to be a commonsense concern, namely, that language learning must

utilize the memory in order to recall syntactical structures, the various meanings of a single word, etc. Memory most surely does play a part when a child is learning a language (such as in the first language game drawn from Augustine in *PI* 1),¹⁸ and we replicate this difficulty when we grow older and begin to learn another language—beginning at complete and total illiteracy, we begin to build the pathways for a new syntax, semantics, and grammar. Anyone who has studied another language knows how memory-intense a study it is. The hours of practice, of committing to memory the definitions of words, the morphology of cases and conjugations, the semantic and phonetic clues that signify a change of mood, a question, a conditional statement, etc. Of

¹⁸Controversy surrounds Wittgenstein's use of Augustine, with some scholars claiming that Wittgenstein is engaging in intentional misuse and misrepresentation of Augustine's views. Others, knowing that Wittgenstein greatly respected Augustine (and read him in both the original Latin and the German edition), do not think his "editing" of Augustine's argument to be trivial or a mistake. Augustine's own views from *De Magistro*, however, support Wittgenstein's criticism of his thought. There, Augustine never questions that words are "signs," and that words "speak within the mind" (5). His interlocutor, his son Adeodatus, claims that because saying does not "present" the thing, saying is therefore a "representation" of something inward. The conclusion is that words do not teach, that we do not learn from signs, but from the "thing in itself." Neither do words reveal the speaker's mind—humans do not even teach each other. Augustine's theological point is that teaching is from within, that is, God speaking in the mind. See Saint Augustine, *Concerning the Teacher and on the Immortality of the Soul*, trans. George G. Leckie (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1938), 5, 33, 43, 45, 51-2, and 55. Myles Burnyeat claims that Wittgenstein left out the first part of Augustine's account in *Confessions* in order to focus on something "new," for, according to Burnyeat, Augustine's argument is not about meaning but epistemology. I would say that it is this very divorce of meaning and knowledge that Wittgenstein is critiquing. See Myles Burnyeat, "Wittgenstein and Augustine *De Magistro*," in *The Augustinian Tradition*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 300. Giovanni Manetti asserts that Augustine's theory of language is "psychological" (in that "signifieds are to be found in the mind") and "communicative" (in that "signifieds pass into the mind of the hearer") (158). He goes on to claim that Augustine "anticipated" the idea that language contained "instructions" for interpretation. See Giovanni Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, trans. Christine Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 158, 162, and 168. One can see here McDowell's point in claiming that the PLA is meant to refute those who desire an "inner language" in order to retain what seems to them to "escape" the senses. Augustine does this very thing by claiming the "object" (or referent) is somehow more important than language, but then he needs an "inner revelation" to talk about it. For his part, Kirwan criticizes Wittgenstein for "misunderstanding" Augustine as claiming that names name objects, when Augustine's real point was the impossibility of teaching. Kirwan himself, however, faults Augustine for thinking words are signs, which seems to be the very thing Wittgenstein was critiquing. See Kirwan, "Augustine's Philosophy of Language," 188-90, 193-4.

course then memory must play a role in language *acquisition*, including our native language. Yet an interesting shift happens in the acquiring of a new language, one attested to empirically by those who gain fluency in a tongue other than their mother-tongue. Usually this shift is indicated by someone voicing in some form or other the new phenomenon of “thinking” in a language versus consciously having to remember grammatical constructions and word definitions. Such a statement does not merely convey some vague, subjective emotion that accompanies gaining fluency in a language, but accurately reflects what indeed happens. At some point, the consciously felt need to remember words, syntax, etc. (and here Wittgenstein might ask, “What does remembering feel like?”) disappears, and we speak with ease in our new language. This is more than simply succeeding in committing something to memory and recalling it at lightning speed; fluency is a matter of achieving a state of “non-reflectivity” as it were, of being able to respond to something spoken as one is able to catch a ball and throw it back again without having to stop and wonder what to do with the ball.¹⁹ It is also a matter of reaching a level of creativity denied the novice, for one can now create thoughts with ease, whereas one was limited before to using sentences only in situations greatly similar to those in which one first learned those sentences. Briefly put, fluency is a grasping of the practice as practice, an internalization of the “rules” in such a way that the evolutionary progress of the language does not “catch one up.” In other words, the commonsense concern with remembering particular aspects of language largely applies to language learning, not use *per se*, and when it does apply to the latter, our status as full

¹⁹I draw this example from *CV* 74.

players of the games makes consulting a dictionary, style guide, etc. a simple process that itself depends on our not being novices in the game. One can invent stories, neologisms, “nonsense words,” all manner of linguistic devices, and do this all knowingly, whereas the novice’s “creativity” is due more to error and accident. Indeed, it is often the novice in the language game who is the most literal interpreter of what she reads or hears.

Furthermore, there are all manner of ways of remembering uses of words, say by recalling an image associated with the word, but as Wittgenstein demonstrates, even in this instance, one must still be oriented to the picture, one must know how to “read” the picture, where to enter it, where to place the frame.²⁰ In other words, remembering the meanings of words, if we have to do this consciously in a particular instance, is not a matter of neutrality, of simply hunting for the referent as if it existed outside context. We can blame, as Wittgenstein does, the dictionary for giving us this illusion.²¹ Yet no one can learn a language via a dictionary along with its etymologies and lists of meanings, and it is important to ask ourselves why this should be so. Dictionaries only help those who already have a “framework” for the language in question, a place-setting for the word, as it were.²² It is easy to forget that lexicons and dictionaries are constructed after pain-staking studies of texts, of every occurrence of the same lexical form throughout the

²⁰There are many instances of this throughout Wittgenstein’s work. See *PI* 6 for a “positive” correlation between successful communication and picturing something; in general, Wittgenstein denies that the meaning of a word is equivalent to an image and simultaneously claims that learning words and meanings is due to achieving certain perspectives: *PI* 140, 257, 265, 294, and 352. In part II of the *PI*, Wittgenstein again demonstrates how thinking that meaning is equivalent to a picture inhibits our understanding of language: see sections iii, vii, and xi. We see similar arguments at *BB* 32, 88-9, and 177.

²¹With reference to the word “God” see *CV* 82; for a more extensive treatment of definitions, see *BB* 25-8.

²²See, for example, *PI* 27, 30, and 199 and *OC* 519 and 548.

history of a language, and only then are the entries written with every nuanced meaning, every metaphorical use, every technical use, a word can have. The same word can have a completely different use on the street than in the law courts, and a general explanation for this polysemy is what a “real” referent is meant to supply, misconceived though it may be.

Wittgenstein, through his own use and examples of language games, demonstrates that what we remember when we must consciously recall the meaning of a word is not the dictionary entry, but particular uses of a word—we remember the *practice* of language, not lists of the meanings of words abstracted from all context. In remembering how a word was used, we do not simply limit ourselves to visualizing one use, but this use itself by necessity “recalls” the entire practice of language even though we are attempting to recall only one word in the language. Propositions or pictures as mnemonics therefore require us to be full players of the language game, and as those players, we have the potential to be highly creative with the language in question. Our knowledge, if any, of the history of meaning, does not then limit our ability to be imaginative language users, as if those previous meanings held us back from using a word in a context vastly different from earlier ones; previous uses of a word do not come from some place outside language, but instead are integral to language learning itself and actually part of becoming a player of the game, leading to new “moves” in that game. Since a central claim of this dissertation is the reader’s responsibility to her creative reading of a text and that such readings are varied and as undetermined as meaning itself is, creativity of interpretation must depend on the creative potential of language itself. On the one hand, the “rules” of the game, the

grammar that we master, provide us a form with which to be creative and do not act to suppress creativity (in other words, creativity implies the question “Creative with what and in what way?” and does not occur “in a vacuum,” i.e., does not occur outside any and all contexts); on the other hand, the very assertion that meanings do not exist prior to use can supply us with both a useful illustration of a void, a meaninglessness, on which meaning itself depends, as well as a different concept of creativity as a process that arises through the very practice of language.

Once we understand that sharing discourse with one another is at least part of what it means to be creative, the hyper-Romantic notion that humans are the complete masters of their fate, endowed with god-like powers of imagination, forging new concepts and visions obedient to their will alone becomes so much hyperbole and woefully indefensible.²³ However, the language game analogy and its associated idea of rules that can be illustrated by, for example, writing following a rubric, or composing lines in accordance with a poetic form, can demonstrate how working within “limitations” actually spurs creativity and yet does not determine the final imagined work. Perhaps it is for this reason that Wittgenstein criticizes how we ponder the word “limit” in that we assume that there must always be something on the other side of a limit or boundary, even when the word is used figuratively.²⁴ It is a mistake to think of the rules of the language game as limitations in this way, somehow implying that beyond such rules there could be

²³Such thinking is still built on metaphorical notions of language, that one can step beyond the practice itself into the “reality” of the “unlanguageable”—one takes the place of God, as it were, the “transcendental signified” that anchors all meaning.

²⁴*CV* 15.

a kind of creativity that was totally “free” (whatever this would mean) and access to which is denied us for some either ontological or epistemological reason. To return to the example of chess, its rules are in one very real way all there is to the game itself, and yet we can construct innumerable strategies in playing the game, negating any sense of “constraints” brought on by the rules of the game, and in fact finding the notion of constraints somewhat nonsensical in that without these rules, there would be no chess, no game at all. As Wittgenstein urges us, we must likewise give up this notion that there is something “within” us called “language” to which we apply the rules of our particular language game, thereby “limiting” what can be said or talked about.²⁵ Like chess, the rules of our language game are largely the game itself—there is no imposition from outside language stipulating what can or cannot be said, thought, or discussed. It is possible to

²⁵Wittgenstein denies countless times in the *PI*, *OC*, and *BB* that language is only a “mental” process. For just one example, see *PI* 170, where he warns us against thinking that a “special” connection exists between our minds and a text when we pay attention to how we read that text. He does not deny that such a special feeling exists, but to think that this feeling bespeaks our ability to reach the “real” meaning of the text is an error. Likewise, McDowell points out the difficulty of claiming that the interpretation (of a sign) grants us understanding. If we erroneously believe that understanding is equivalent to following signs “in the mind,” or something similar, we tend to conclude that there is a “connection” to the “inert” sign that amounts to “right behavior.” We depend on such a connection when we assert interpretation as understanding, but McDowell (and Wittgenstein) demonstrates that we can continue to question how this “right” interpretation really is understanding, and we are returned to the idea of the “self-interpreting” sign. See McDowell, “Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,” 265-66. Cavell discusses the problem with the “traditional” idea of criteria: even within the same contexts, criteria for something can also count against it. Nothing tells us why certain criteria accompany certain states in certain situations, but these are simply asserted *a priori*. See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy*, 41 and 43. Harris calls the theory of the transfer of one person’s ideas to the mind of another “telementation.” The idea itself can never be “discovered,” for such a theory stipulates that the only things that exist are ideas—they are the very things that get the theory off the ground. See Roy Harris, “The Role of the Language Myth in the Western Cultural Tradition,” in *The Language Myth in Western Culture*, ed. Roy Harris (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2002), 16-17. David Schalkwyk marks a difference between symptoms and criteria, claiming that “inner experience” does not give us meaning, but how criteria “are applied.” So, for example, something can appear to be a certain emotion (symptom) but fail to be an example of said emotion (failure as a criterion because the context precludes us from asserting it is what it appears to be). Criteria are “indefinite” in that the assertion will never be forced upon us as if certain “conditions” were fulfilled, as if by “logical entailment.” See David Schalkwyk, “Fiction as ‘Grammatical’ Investigation: A Wittgensteinian Account,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (1995): 289, 291.

conclude that the language game is itself a product of the imagination or even *is* the imagination reconceived, a creative way of interacting with one another and our shared environment, an *activity* as Wittgenstein claims.²⁶ As imaginative activity, language use is then already rooted in creativity, in the processes of shaping, building, constructing, tearing down, and rebuilding meaning as we interact with others through discourse.

Building on this analysis of language games, we can think of the rules of a language game as being made explicit in the patterns of grammar and syntax of that language. Taking English as an example, when one shows a child a rose and names it thus, and also names the colors of its petals and points out the potential danger of its thorns, one is doing much more than labeling an “object” in the child’s environment.²⁷ Not only does the child learn to identify something, she learns that roses are the kinds of things that have colors, that have other things “attached” to them, i.e., she effectively learns “nouns” and “subjects” without having such concepts named. Aristotle, then, was making a profoundly beautiful observation when he demonstrated that in Greek one says “the log is white” and not the other way round (and if one does say it the other way round, he contends that the speaker still intends a “substratum” for the whiteness—the white “thing” is a log, and the pattern that noun-subjects follow remains the same).²⁸ Aristotle of course catapults himself from this linguistic observation into a grand ontological scheme of substances and their division into genera and species, but on the grammatical

²⁶*PI* 546: “Words are also deeds.”

²⁷At *PI* 6, Wittgenstein discusses the difference between ostensive definition and ostensive teaching. The latter precedes the former and is the activity of the “adult” while the former is the activity of the “child.”

²⁸*Posterior Analytics* 1.22.83a.

level, he was doing nothing more than observing the scaffolding of his own language game. However, neither Wittgenstein nor we have to be concerned with whether white is a “substance” or an “accidental quality,” nor do we need to investigate the difference between describing something as white and discussing “whiteness.” The grammatical observation that Aristotle made in, for example, *Categories* chapter 5, that nouns are the kinds of thing about which one can ask “What color is it?” or “How big is it?” is made from “inside” the language game as it were, exhibiting the role nouns play in questions, descriptions, and assertions in Greek and related Indo-European languages. If the child in the above example were to learn grammar from the sentence given, she would simply be giving explicit expression to the structure her discourse takes, not learning, as Aristotle would have it, an ontology of substances or the universal ontological categories of “physicality” and “abstraction.”

The grammatical structure of the game becomes evident when one is knowingly inventive with language, as when one creates metaphors. Metaphors very often create for us a similarity between disparate things, very often by playing off “abstract” properties of “physical” objects, a pattern by which we can come to understand something better or grasp all at once a speaker’s or writer’s intention of how we as an audience should think of a person or object. As Wittgenstein would point out,²⁹ we have to know through our

²⁹On having to be a master of the game, see *PI* 338. On the denial that words for physical objects are not meant to divide one group of objects from another (that one is not making an ontological statement), see *BB* 51 and *OC* 36. Wittgenstein makes an interesting comment on onomatopoeic words like “rustling” at *BB* 84: he says that such words are being used as patterns and meant to be compared to what they represent—they are not being used as words, per se. (Of course, onomatopoeia is itself culturally bound—not all dogs “bark.”) Wittgenstein was of course not averse to very often using metaphors and similes. As just one example, we are the “fly” needing to be shown a way out of the “fly bottle” at *PI* 309.

particular language game what counts as a “physical object” and what does not, and how to talk about such objects, but once we have mastered this none-too-small feat, we can invent all sorts of metaphors, similes, and other fun linguistic devices. These devices (uses) themselves of course depend heavily on how certain words are already used in the language, and their invention and comprehension depends on our grasping the grammar of our language game. Indeed, as Wittgenstein himself makes use of them, metaphors and similes may help reveal to us the grammatical structure of the game itself, what can “count” as a noun, for example. Only by becoming a full player of the game can we achieve this high level of creativity.

Turning to my claim that linguistic creativity depends in part on meaninglessness, described as that void of meaning (the inexpressible) prior to the use of words, the “region” itself that holds the language game in place so to speak, I need first to clarify the terms “meaninglessness” or “meaningless.” These terms can of course be used pejoratively as synonyms for nonsense, to assert that someone is speaking irrationally or not making logical connections. They can also be used in a more mystical and semi-religious sense as descriptions of “divine” ineffability, for example, the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius. I do not mean the term in either of these ways, but simply as a name for that “boundary” implied in understanding that meaning does not exist a-contextually, before sharing discourse with others. The feeling of coming up against that boundary is often expressed as it were by calling something “inexpressible” in hopes of capturing one’s loss for words or description. The “grammar” of the inexpressible is then an exploration of loss for meaning when engaging with others, or alternatively the sense

of an excess of meanings and possibilities resulting from this engagement. Such a grammar has much in common, then, with the divine ineffability of religious mysticism, but differs from it by understanding meaning to emanate from a symbiosis of self and other, from Being-with, and to not be a private affair (the subject's personal understanding of the divine) nor emanate from relating or connecting words correctly with objects. Divine ineffability, on the other hand, claims that God or the One cannot by definition be fully described or perhaps described at all, that language is inadequate for this task, and in so claiming implies that language's primary role is as a tool for description, i.e., the correct assignation of properties to an object, a role that also implies that the meanings of words are best understood as correspondences between words and objects. The grammar of the inexpressible is therefore played out constantly as each person interprets her own existence (Being-with-others-in-the-world) and comes to an understanding, authentic or inauthentic, of self.

The void of meaninglessness is nowhere and everywhere in language. It is a void we as speakers do indeed recognize, but from which we often shrink away in our refusal to hear others. It is this turning away that Wittgenstein shows to result in thinking meaning comes from an "inner" process, or is equivalent to finding the "correct" label for an object, etc. The answer to the question, "But where do (new) meanings come from?" must be "From meaninglessness," not from the self or the correct sighting of things in view.³⁰ Even if "family resemblances" between multiple uses of a word seem to imply a

³⁰At *OC* 559, Wittgenstein calls the language game "unpredictable," something that is groundless. At *CV* 16, he says: "Perhaps what is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against which whatever I could express has its meaning." And at *CV* 73: "What we regard as

chain of causation leading to the next use, the new use, though related to the others, nevertheless arises from this seeming void, this apparent nowhere. As when, for example, one finds oneself using a metaphor one never before used, the new meaning seems just suddenly to appear in our speech, as if by fiat. If we turn away from thinking that meaning is equivalent to use, we are tempted to pursue the question of origins or causation discussed above. The question of origins is itself worded badly in that it assumes words are mere objects the genesis of which arises from utility or simple need, but at the heart of this question is a concern for how one can be genuinely creative with language. Following Wittgenstein, new uses, as creative acts, are not invented through some “pure” free will, but depend on a prior sharing of discourse and the grammar of the language game. Even though we can “see” a connection between a new use and old one—which is, finally, all that “family resemblance” really means—family resemblance has little explanatory power when it comes to understanding linguistic creativity. Although using a physiognomical metaphor for an “abstract” process like thinking may seem to stretch the comparison too far, we should recall that Wittgenstein did not proffer this term as an explanation *per se*, but as an antidote to our penchant for generality and looking for a common substrate that binds the different uses of a word or group of words.

Perhaps it is better to say that the new use of a word is more akin to inventing a word *de novo*, that there are no synonyms, but only thousands of homonyms and homophones, thereby emphasizing that a new use is truly a new meaning. On the other

expression *consists* in incalculability. If I knew exactly how he would grimace, move, there would be no facial expression, no gesture.”

hand, we do seem to “see,” for example, a connection between the phrases “interpreting a text” and “interpreting a facial expression,” even though there is a subtle shift in the use of the word “interpreting,” and it seems reasonable to conclude that we use the same word in both instances *because* we see a connection between the activities. But Wittgenstein would have us think differently, urging us to understand that we ourselves *make* the relation and connection by using the same word in both instances, and that our language game did not act autonomously as it were, causing us to use the same word in two different circumstances.³¹ By using the “same” word, we are actually telling someone how to understand these two completely different actions, how to find a similarity between them. We do so effortlessly, yet to claim that there is some similarity that we simply label would be to make a doubly-mistaken claim by on the one hand thinking that words are nothing more than labels waiting to be attached to referents, and on the other that there is some kind of empirical evidence or data between these two

³¹Cf. *PI* 40, which denies the correspondence theory of meaning as an error resulting from confusing the “meaning of a name” with its “bearer.” Extending this line of reasoning, we can see that words are not objects to be compared with anything, and so the notion of referents as the placeholders of meanings collapses, taking Frege and Russell with it. At *PI* 66, Wittgenstein speaks of complicated networks within language, not “commonalities” that imply meanings. In part II.xi of *PI*, Wittgenstein remarks on how seeing different aspects of something implies the “mastery” of a technique. Applied to language, such reasoning implies that metaphors, similes, etc., are not the products of observation but the result of being a master or full player of a language game. At *BB* 58 and 138-9, Wittgenstein discusses how a single word can be said to have two uses, that this “expresses a decision,” a way to look at things—once more, multiple meanings are not “caused” by some connection to multiple objects that can be compared or contrasted. In his explanation of how Wittgenstein thinks about language, Stern in his *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 8, claims that changes in context or perspective do not change the meaning of a word/sentence, for this would imply that there is only one “valid” meaning that is changed. Instead, a change in context, etc., implies a completely different meaning—we did not “miss” or “lose” one. In this sense, a new meaning arises not from a comparison with the old one as a paradigm case, but from a different set of circumstances—this is all we need to “justify” the new use. Furthermore, the speaker may enrich her listeners’ appreciation of language by “asking” them to look at these meanings together, giving them a feeling of deeper significance. This feeling of deeper significance is brought out by Wittgenstein with the duck-rabbit picture. Knowing that one can see it as both a duck and rabbit makes the picture more interesting, even if we can only see it as one or the other in a single viewing.

activities of interpreting that everyone notices and to which we all simply attach the label “interpreting.” Following Wittgenstein, it is part of the goal of this dissertation to deny the view of language such claims entail. Identifying “family resemblances” is helpful, then, by revealing the working of imagination (a key element for my thesis) in linguistic creativity, even if the implication of a “visual” similarity, as if looking at a photograph of two related persons, does not adequately capture the concept of multiple meanings. But it would be a mistake to push Wittgenstein’s metaphor too far, especially since the entire *PI* can be seen as a meditation on not just meaning, but multiple meanings of the “same” word.

Returning to the notion of meaninglessness, since we cannot a priori determine how a word will be used in the future, nor can we know what contexts will arise that will help shape that use, it is best to think of “meaninglessness” as an actual structure of the language game, akin in some respects to Sartre’s notion that ignorance structures knowledge.³² The way I understand meaninglessness is not as a “property” of language, but more a condition for the actual existence of language and therefore a condition for the existence of thought. The “grammar of the inexpressible” informs all our language games and all our linguistic creativity, for those games and that creativity depend on another being’s discourse, which is not expressed by us, but listened for in expectation. There is no limited fund or reserve of meanings that we will eventually exhaust in our use of language, for the only death of language is the death of a people, the disappearance of

³²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, trans. Adrian van den Hoven (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), beginning at page 59 to the end.

that communal group with a common tongue.³³ As long as that group continues, its language will live on, undergoing change to be sure but nonetheless continuing. And as long as that language exists, like a people, it has a history and that history can be misconceived in terms of cause and effect. It is no wonder that new uses seem to spring unbidden from old ones and that the history of meaning seems to call for a profound understanding of cause and effect, for a group (and anyone studying that group, that world, *as* a system, e.g., the anthropologist) with a shared past or shared language cannot help but see internal cohesion and relation within its own language since the members themselves are that system of cohesion and disclose truth in discourse. Such internal cohesion seems to beg for notions of causality and destiny, but history, understood as the “situation” in Sartrean terms, does not “determine” us, and so the history of meaning does not “determine” our use of language. With each individual being comes a possibility of a new perspective and “detachment” from all that came before, a space opened by the imaginative engagement with the world and others. Language can happen precisely because there is no-thing there already, because there are no determined meanings. Language is that thinking activity that is our imaginative engagement with a world, dependent very much on our being able to envision ourselves apart from whatever world we “see.” The meaninglessness, the inexpressibility at the heart of language, becomes the creative anvil on which we forge our meaning in discourse.

³³And even this is questionable, given the rehabilitation of “dead” languages as modes of discourse, such as Latin in the medieval and Renaissance eras.

Part II. Reading and the Poiesis of Belief

The book is full of life—not like a man, but like an ant-heap.

Wittgenstein

If you want to go down deep you do not need to travel far; indeed, you don't have to leave your most immediate and familiar surroundings.

Wittgenstein

Although Wittgenstein focuses primarily on explaining how words “have” meaning, and discusses only intermittently the interpretation of texts *per se*, his thinking pertains to this dissertation since both texts and spoken language are discourse, as discussed in the introduction.³⁴ Even though it is true that, as Plato points out in the *Phaedrus*,³⁵ a text cannot reply to one's questions in the form of gestures, facial expressions, and actual speech (a point which implies that Plato thinks meaning must be anchored to what is temporally present and possibly even to objects that can be “seen” in some way), the author's voice still communicates and allows us as readers to hear language, and so still must be part of the language game.

³⁴There are scattered references to texts and interpretation throughout his works. At *PI* 170-178, and again at 201, he remarks on the feeling of being guided when we read sentences and “interpret” them. The German here, however, is *Deutung*, which indeed can mean “interpretation,” but can also mean “explanation” or “application.” I do not think it implies that more systematic form of interpretation one refers to when, for example, taking a Freudian approach to literature. The same is true for the first instances of “interpret” in part II.xi, though I have not checked every instance of the English “interpret” or its cognates in this section. At *CV* 40, Wittgenstein again uses what is translated as “interpretations” in the context of poetics. But here the German is *Auffassungen*, which may be better translated as “comprehension” or “intellectual grasp,” and so again is not exactly synonymous with a systematic, theoretical approach to texts. Books and religious belief are briefly mentioned at *CV* 62 and 64, and though Wittgenstein still uses *Auffassung*, the meaning here is closer to a theoretical framework. At *BB* 141, Wittgenstein remarks on the interconnections among understanding, interpreting, and reacting. At *BB* 177 is the briefest remark on being “impressed” by something read, which can lead to trying to reify this impression through language.

³⁵275c-e.

What I will argue in the rest of this chapter is that the beliefs which we take away from the reading of the text (beliefs considered as either the “holistic” meaning of the text, what we think the text is saying about whatever it is doing that saying, or personal or secondary beliefs resulting from our engagement with the text) may have reasons behind them, but no cause, as those terms have been understood by Wittgenstein.³⁶ As he points

³⁶*BB* 15. At *CV* 32, Wittgenstein claims that “[H]istorical proof...is irrelevant to belief” and that people “seize” religious messages “believingly (i.e., lovingly).” In the same text, at 45, Wittgenstein claims that “believing means submitting to an authority.” Again, at 58-9, now regarding art, Wittgenstein asserts that it is absurd to think we know how the artist felt during the creation of the art. With respect to poetry, and literary art in general, this would have to mean that there is no “access” to the emotions of the author, and therefore no way to claim the only “correct” (here being defined as synonymous with authorial intent) interpretation of the art. Wittgenstein claims that such feelings as the author had do not “concern me *at all*” (original italics). At 64, Wittgenstein likens religious belief to a way of life or “a way of assessing life.” It is desiring a certain interpretation, a certain way of understanding the world. At 85, Wittgenstein remarks that religious believers “would never have come to believe as a result of such proofs [“proofs” of God’s existence].” All these remarks imply that religious beliefs, those based on the interpretation of a sacred text, are seized on because of a certain desire, for certain “personal” reasons, not because of the definitions of certain words or simply as a by-product of reading.

Whether Wittgenstein was a “realist” or “non-realist” regarding religious beliefs is a rather controversial topic within the philosophy of religion. Amesbury claims that “Wittgenstein did not hold the view either that religion can be understood only by those who participate in it [fideism] or that it cannot be criticized” and that “it is possible to comprehend a form of life in which one does not personally participate” (47, 50). He makes the further claim that “the expressivist reading of Wittgenstein is itself a symptom of the very positivistic understanding of language that Wittgenstein was concerned to subvert” (55). Citing Clack, he explains that such reading must assume language should be descriptive, and since religious language is not descriptive of “verifiable” objects, its purpose must simply be to arouse the emotions. See Amesbury, “Has Wittgenstein Been Misunderstood by Wittgensteinian Philosophers of Religion?” 47, 50, 55. Clack simply contends that Wittgenstein did not have an expressivist view of religion, that the “cognitive” versus “non-cognitive” approach to religion (e.g., that ritual is “instrumental action” based on beliefs that are either true or false, or is just an “expression” of emotion) is similar to the belief vs. attitude distinction, a “neat distinction problematized” by Wittgenstein. He claims that since there is no “general form” of description and that context is primary, “stable” notions of cognitive and non-cognitive break down. See Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” 47-8, 56, and 58. Phillips demonstrates that the realist’s claim that our actions are based on “the trustworthiness of our beliefs” is what Wittgenstein calls making our beliefs “sense-impressions” (37). By ignoring context, the realist does not explain the relationship between “belief” and “object of belief.” Paying attention to context means recognizing that labeling is its own “method of projection” and is not “independent of the procedure” (38). Ultimately, “we cannot, as the realist supposes, give the same kind of account of belief in every context. To say that the relation between belief and its object varies is to say that contexts of application vary” (40). He argues, however, that Wittgenstein is also not a non-realist, someone who considers beliefs to be “mere expressions” regardless of their objects. If religions were to be their own language games, they would ultimately be “superfluous” (only “insiders” would care enough to play) or “un-criticizable” (making Wittgenstein a fideist, which Phillips denies). See Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, 37-8, 40, 48, 57. Alec Irwin also thinks that a non-fideist Wittgenstein can explain much regarding theology, that Wittgenstein believed the ordinary to be “mysterious” and being human a “journey.” He thinks the *PI* is

out with respect to meaning, we do not learn the meanings of words according to strict rules, but when asked to explain our interpretation of a text (how we read it), we as readers often attempt to validate or anchor our reading precisely by making language conform to such rules. In so doing, we ignore for the moment that if a word had a certain meaning only because of a rule, and that rule never failed to function, then meanings would have a one-to-one correspondence with words and polysemy (here in the form of unique and multiple readings of a text), which obviously exists, would not be. As noted previously, Wittgenstein demonstrates the nonsensicality of such an idea of meaning, and the related idea that the meaning of a text can be reduced to only one interpretation, for which a rule and not the human being is “responsible,” is equally nonsensical. Stranger still, when other readers by supplying their own reasonable interpretations demonstrate

meant to “humanize” its readers. See Alec Irwin, “Face of Mystery, Mystery of a Face: An Anthropological Trajectory in Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Kaufman’s Biohistorical Theology,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 3 (1995): 389-90, 408-409.

Opposing views exist: Jonathan Adler claims we have “reactive attitudes” (e.g., resentment) that are “full,” that is, go beyond any “evidence” for such a “complete” emotion. He concludes that we often judge without full evidence or knowledge, that our emotions bias us, but that these reactions are ultimately “natural.” See Jonathan E. Adler, “Constrained Belief and Reactive Attitudes,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57, no. 4 (1997): 891-2, 895, 897-8. Edward Berryman assumes that Wittgenstein was a coherentist or conventionalist, and that we should give up trying to explain religious beliefs. See Edward Berryman, “Belief, Apparitions, and Rationality: The Social Scientific Study of Religion after Wittgenstein,” *Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences* 28, no. 1 (2005): 18, especially note 4. N. K. Verbin takes the behaviorist view that Wittgenstein thinks our beliefs are based solely on our actions, not the opposite realist view. See N. K. Verbin, “Uncertainty and Religious Belief,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2002): 26. Vasiliou claims something similar: “A person is brought up, or initiated into a particular tradition, a particular way of life, and then finds himself *acting* in certain ways—and *then* expressing his belief in certain things” (39, original italics). He goes on to explain how “propositions” that are the language game itself are neither justified nor unjustified, that we cannot “know” them, but his notion of belief still strikes me as too simple, too determinative and expressivist. See Vasiliou, “Wittgenstein, Religious Belief, and *On Certainty*,” 39, 43. Finally, M. Jamie Ferreira takes issue with Phillips, claiming that Wittgenstein thought “real” belief in God to be totalizing, that there was no “gradient” for such belief. He admits to holding a “Wittgensteinian realism.” See M. Jamie Ferreira, “Religion and ‘Really Believing’: Belief and the Real,” in *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. T. Tessin and M. von der Ruhr (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 94, 97.

that texts do not conform to the supposedly correct interpretations imposed on them, the reader who assumes they should finds herself blaming not her own misconceptions regarding discourse, but either the text's (language's) "confused" or "misleading" elements, or, more often, she simply accuses other interpreters of being "bad" readers. She stubbornly holds to her own interpretation as if it were a solid scientific law that cannot be changed, elevating it to universal authoritative status, outside all context and even usurping the text that is its putative source. This kind of confusion is but one example of how the reader who refuses to hear others reads a text, leading to that reader's assertion that what she believes a text to be "saying" has a cause internal to the text and does not depend on her imaginative encounter with discourse.

It is important to understand not only exactly how Wittgenstein in works like the *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Blue and Brown Books* is trying to clear away such confusions, as he calls them, over meaning, but also that such confusions have a long history in philosophy. Although certainly an idea long before Aristotle, Aristotle is the philosopher who asserts and attempts to explain how language reflects the ontological structure of the universe. Aristotle assumes in works like *Prior Analytics* and *Categories* that an analysis of language will reveal, in addition to grammatical structures, how the human mind works, and further, how the external world influences that working. For Aristotle, to claim that "log," for example, is an *onoma*, a name, is not simply to invoke a grammatical category, one that implies predicates and that can be the "subject of a sentence"; from his theoretical viewpoint, nouns are also the linguistic analogues of substances, so a grammatical analysis of how we use nouns becomes an ontological

investigation of not only what is, but how existents interact and how their properties adhere to them. The permutation of this Aristotelian thinking persists in the modern era, most notably in any “logical positivist” theory of language. By denying that meaning is contextualized, and also that the polyvalent and mutable nature of interpretations is something called for by the text itself, positivists are in fact implying that an interpretation should ideally reflect some extra-linguistic, permanent source of meaning, whether that source be the physical world or some other definition of “reality.”

Logical positivism not only assumes there are ideal meanings of words, but also supposes that language is our source of error by “causing” us to view reality “incorrectly” through the inherent “vagueness” and “ambiguities” of grammar and meanings. It is exactly this type of theorizing about language Wittgenstein finds troubling and incoherent, and he demonstrates that meaning in language has nothing to do with being equivalent to either a physical description or to any permanent truth lying at the heart of reality. At the same time, however, that Wittgenstein shows the nonsensicality of this type of realism and correspondence theory, he also explains how any relativist theory of truth, knowledge, or the “value” of interpretations, which makes the exact same kind of assumption as logical positivism, only in reverse, as it were, is equally nonsensical. Upon accepting that all the various interpretations of a text arise from a genuine encounter with discourse, a relativist of the sort criticized by Wittgenstein makes the leap that this must mean there is no absolute standard of truth by which to evaluate interpretations, that any interpretation is as good as another. Yet this assumption still rests on the idea that language is or should be only an enormously complex descriptive tool, that it is or should

be nothing more than a pure reflection of reality itself, and that an analysis of language and how it works, and by extension how finding meaning works, will give us a sound and truthful picture of that reality. In short, the relativist is a profound skeptic who assumes that meaning *should* still be a one-to-one correspondence with things, and that truth is a “correct” description of these things, an agreement between language and object. The relativist combines this idealistic version of language with the empirical observation that a multitude of valid interpretations, and so a multitude of valid descriptions, exists, putting absolute truth out of reach and thereby opening the door to the skeptical conclusion that all interpretations are equally “good” or “bad,” remaining indifferent to them all. But as we have seen, Wittgenstein rejects the notion that language is a reflection, image, representation, label, or substitute for the physical or empirical world, or any other “reality”; in other words, language is not a medium through which meaning arrives via semiosis, however conceived.³⁷ We must keep this in mind if we are to absorb

³⁷Harris calls the idea that words acquire meaning by standing for something else “surrogationalism.” He says that Wittgenstein totally opposes this idea, whereas Saussure only partially does so, for Saussure does think a word stands for a “concept.” For Harris, a key difference between the two thinkers is that Wittgenstein believes language to be “embedded” in a form of life, but for Saussure, language use can be “segregated” from every other human activity. See Harris, *Language, Saussure, and Wittgenstein: How to Play Games with Words*, 10, 14, 113. Saussure himself claims that humans make a “system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas” (10), the sign being a combination of “signifier” (sound) and “signified” (concept). He considers the connection between signifier and signified “arbitrary,” unlike a symbol, for symbols have “inherent meaning.” He does seem to deny, however, that words “express pre-existent ideas” (116). See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye, and Albert Reidlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (London: Peter Owen, 1974), 10, 68, and 116. Umberto Eco elaborates the sign-theory of language, claiming that if a sign yields multiple interpretations, it must either be “uncoded,” symbolic (“vaguely coded”), or in the process of being coded. It seems to me that Eco implies that codification yields certainty, that he is still primarily concerned with being epistemologically certain of the reference of the sign. See Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 39. Roman Jakobson applies such code-theory to literature, claiming that six factors exist for any “speech-act”: an “addresser” sending a message to an addressee; the message is “contextualized”; the context must be understood by the addressee and able to be “verbalized,” that is, “codified”; the code is a “shared” code; the message itself is sent by a “contact” that allows for communication. See Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Style in Language*, ed. T. A. Sebeok

the full impact of Wittgenstein's thought, as well as to understand the impact of that thought on the reading of texts.

It is vastly important at this point to make distinctions among various kinds of reading, and among the contexts in which those readings participate, in order to understand how reading is an imaginative structuring of self. Speaking from a purely descriptive perspective, we seem to imbue our interpretations with varying levels of authority, largely depending on whether the text in question is considered "fiction" or "non-fiction."³⁸ We seem to feel less beholden to the interpretations we construct for what we consider mere entertainment without any claim to truth than we do to our interpretations of what we consider "truthful" or "serious" texts. Yet regardless of how we feel about interpretations regarding these two "kinds" of texts, we come to those interpretations in the same way—the "act" of reading, understood as a response to our ontological Being-with-others, is the same. Reading is always an engagement with discourse, and all texts are discourse, even those overtly trying to deceive or merely entertain. The more important factor when it comes to comparing how different

(Cambridge, MA: Tech Press of MIT, 1960), 353. John Searle attempts to destabilize all such code-theories of language, claiming that intentional consciousness is necessary for meaning. He claims that "formal symbol manipulations" are simply "syntax without semantics," without meaning. If the brain were simply a computer decoding language-signs as if the latter were a program, the brain could "simulate" certain actions but never "duplicate" them. The symbols of the program itself would be "uninterpretable" by the computer. This is what the "Chinese room" example is meant to show. In other words, program theories can explain behavioral output, but not real communication, not the inventive quality of language. See John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," in *Minds, Brains, and Computers: The Foundations of Cognitive Science: An Anthology*, ed. Robert Cummins and Denise Dellarosa Cummins (London: Blackwell, 2000), 149-50.

³⁸I place these descriptors in quotation marks because I want to call into question the "truth-value" of these arbitrary categories. Namely, I do not agree that a "non-fiction" text is somehow better, more correct, or more truthful than one considered "fiction," one on which we can somehow more securely rely. See chapters 3 and 4 for a fuller explanation of this, as well as volume I of Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought*.

meanings are assigned to different texts is understanding which are the products of what I call “reflective reading” and which are not, or to put it another way, which ones are the result of an engagement with a literary work of art, work that modifies our reading to become “reflective.” The danger I am attempting to uncover is that all too often we allow prior beliefs and our object orientation to dictate the authoritative status of a text *prior* to reading it, or based on only a cursory examination. Such reading is no longer authentic reading, for it means that a text’s status as a work of art is determined not by the work, but instead by whether we agree with the text’s “message” or not. In this way, entire genres (e.g., science fiction, horror), types (novels, poetry), or classifications (non-fiction, fiction) of texts, or even particular authors, can be and often are automatically excluded from being worthwhile reading, “good” and/or “truthful” in some way.

To put it briefly, we interpret anything read (but throughout this dissertation I want to keep the focus on literary works of art, especially sacred texts) and come away with beliefs about the text’s importance and possibly about the extra-textual world. While the latter can be anything from scientific hypotheses or theories to more “philosophical” or personal beliefs, the former arise as a reply to the question, “Why should one read this text?” We do not “think” about this kind of interpretation; it simply is for us, nothing more than the outcome of our reading the text, or possibly just a few pages or a summary of it.³⁹ In Heideggerian terms, the text first presents itself to us as a

³⁹Cf. *PI* 170, 176, and 198. Here Wittgenstein remarks on the “chimera” of guidance, something that occurs especially when we read slowly and pay attention to the words. In this way arises a feeling that the written language connects to us via some unconscious means, that we simply respond to the written language as if it created its own meaning. At 198, he says “Interpretations by themselves do not determine meaning,” using the example of following a sign, e.g., a road sign. We can talk about how we respond to the sign, how our actions are influenced by seeing the sign, but this is to assume a learned custom, not to understand “what

mere object of use, and therefore presents itself as having a value, whether that be a positive or negative value. This initial “un-thinking” reading finds its basis in a subject-object orientation, an orientation that itself can be questioned, as will be shown more fully in the next chapter. As part of that explanation, the question of “why read?” is better answered not by relying on a value or doctrinal system that affirms or is confirmed by the text, but by affirming the text to be a work of art which brings us before beings, including ourselves, thereby allowing us imaginatively to construct an authentic self and an authentic hearing of others.

Reflective interpretation has a different relationship with the text and is a different type of belief-oriented reading. In this process, we are constantly considering the development of our own thematic interpretation (what the meaning of the text is as a whole), the evolution of the beliefs we are forming as a result of reading the text. These new beliefs are undergoing constant examination, constant comparison with previous beliefs and previous perspectives, the fitting in to our particular “worldview.” During this reading practice, we are consciously aware that we are attempting to use these beliefs to modify our behavior, in short, as some sort of ethical guide or reasoning. It is during this poesis of belief made possible by reading the text that we may decide not to hear

this going-by-the-sign really consists in.” Extending this notion to the activity of reading, one could think of it this way: reading is the grasping of language, and our telling someone else what we have read is akin to an explanation (*Deutung*) of how we “apply” the text. It is the reasoning behind our thoughts and/or actions, but it is not a replacement for the text, no matter how much we might like it to be. The text is still the ground for our reading, not established by our reading. Another way to put this would be to say that telling someone what we think a text means is not, contrary to what we may think, the explanation of the process of how meaning arises. We can attempt to validate our reading by thinking that the meaning we assign is a product of the process of how meaning arises in general, that the two processes are the same, but this is a mistake. The remarks by Wittgenstein here are meant to call this assumption into question, and ultimately to undermine that assumption.

another person communicating with us, i.e., read inauthentically, and thereby come to think that our beliefs and our interpretation are directly caused by the text itself. Such a misconception stipulates that the meaning at which we arrive is already “within” the text, buried there like a treasure, hidden in a cryptic code to which we alone (or perhaps even the text) have the symbolic key. But as we have learned from Wittgenstein, to assert such is to make no sense of language. As he points out, when we try to answer why we say a word or proposition means such-and-such, we are tempted to move beyond giving reasons (for example, a context or a feeling) and attempt to find an ultimate cause in language, a static and permanent meaning hidden behind all the others, one which we have discovered or somehow already knew. In sum, we are tempted to claim that meanings exist prior to use, and in our attempts to give reasons, we confuse reasons with causes.

As stated previously, non-reflective reading is our standard default setting when it comes to reading a text, our orientation toward the text as an object the only purpose of which is to be enjoyed, or to teach, or to divert, etc. This primary mode is epistemic, for we claim we “know” what the text “means,” we know “what it is trying to say,” for we “know” what the text is “about.” In the non-reflective mode, we care little why we ourselves arrive at our particular interpretation—we simply accept it and move on. This is one possible reason for the fiction/non-fiction division being understood as indicative of texts which are “worthwhile” and those that are not. Texts that we assume have nothing to “say” to us, that is, call for no serious reflection, are “mere” fiction, a dangerous diversion or benign entertainment. This facile division becomes quickly problematic,

however, once we realize that most poetry and countless novels, stories, and plays also call for deep reflection. Hence, one often comes in contact with “didactic” theories of literature and their bid to “save” the reading of fiction as worthwhile “teachers,” but even if one rejects these theories, one cannot seem to escape from thinking that the genius of fiction appears to lie in its ability to call for reflection without calling attention to or representing itself as a scientific, religious, or philosophical authority. The experience of reflective reading is different in at least this one very important respect, namely that when we reflect on the reading of a text, we are in effect asking ourselves *why* we have arrived at such an interpretation. This self-questioning is a way of organizing our thoughts and all our previous beliefs around what is coming about from the reading of the text at hand. This is why in the reflective mode how our reading is embodied changes in that we tend to pore over texts, we examine them, reread them, read them slowly. But while reflective reading grants us the possibility of authentically hearing the text, it does not guarantee that such a hearing will take place. It is simply the mode the self must be in for such hearing to occur.⁴⁰

We can, for instance, reflectively read texts that do not agree with previously held beliefs, texts that in fact do conflict with our *Weltanschauung*. But, if this is the case, we are either thrown into a crisis of belief, a chance to imagine a new self, or we simply conclude that the text is “wrong,” “mistaken,” “foolish,” or even “heretical”—in short, we

⁴⁰Hent de Vries says that the world is not a “representation” but a “call”—we do not “know” other minds, but call and respond to them. He of course is influenced by Cavell in this, claiming that “philosophical meditation” is connected with “confession.” See Hent de Vries, “From ‘Ghost in the Machine’ to ‘Spiritual Automaton’: Philosophical Meditation in Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Levinas,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60, no. 1-3 (2006): 78 and 83.

mute the text. On the other hand, we expect that texts we pore over, that we examine, have something to tell us, and we have assumed that they will guide our thinking in some way. It is this expectation of guidance that corresponds to our giving the text an authority other texts do not have, and this has nothing to do with the categories of “fiction” or “non-fiction.” If a reader truly believes that a novel, for example, has something to teach, is a guide to living, then that reader more than likely will certainly pore over the text, reread it, examine it carefully. There is a religious quality to such reflective reading, even if the text itself does not fall within the “genre” of religious texts, for it bespeaks a devotion to the text and a willingness to conform one’s thoughts and behavior to those stipulated or otherwise illustrated in the text. Works in philosophy or other speculative works often have a following of those who wish to be disciplined by (i.e., become disciples of) the text. The effect of misreading (in the sense of imposing certain beliefs on the text prior to any engagement with discourse) on the other hand, is a closed loop: the reader expects guidance as if by rules or doctrines, searches for an interpretation to substantiate that guidance, and will inevitably arrive at the guidance sought in the form of the prior assumed system of beliefs. Such is the kind of thinking a particular community uses to validate its current practices and obviate any need to explore their impact on others or themselves by, for example, using a sacred text to claim divine authority for their actions. The temptation to think that one’s interpretation is following a method or rules embedded in the text arises, as Wittgenstein helps point out, because for every turn in the text, the reader can answer the question *why*, can still arrive at an answer in the form of a lesson learned, the value imputed to the text. Every successive *why* returns

another answer that shares an internal logical coherence with all the previous answers, thereby strengthening such a reading practice. Being able to answer the question *why* with regard to interpretative moves seems to substantiate that the text itself is conforming to strict rules of interpretation, that one's particular interpretation must be the "right" one because one knows and uses the rules. The final conclusion to all this activity is that such a reader believes being able to give reasons for interpretative moves must mean that such reasons are not "subjective" in nature, but are "objective" causes of the meaning at which one arrives. If one reduces reading and building meaning to nothing more than a search for a validation of propositional beliefs, one must assume that such beliefs are caused by the text, by the internal coherence of the text's "true" meaning, and not through any imaginative construction on the reader's part.

Wittgenstein explains how we come to believe that reasons we give for thinking certain things are equivalent to causes, to a scientific or ineluctable fact that calls for passivity on the part of the language user, not activity or practice. In the "Blue Book," he discusses two distinct ways of confusing how we think about reasons.⁴¹ On the one hand, one can emphasize the ever-present possibility of finding reasons for doing things, reasons that seem to stretch on to infinity. Wittgenstein rejects the notion that enumerating the reasons for doing something will never end, likening this to the conclusion that because a line of definite length can be subdivided in an infinite (here, uncountable) variety of ways, then the line itself must be of infinite length. Wittgenstein instead asserts that the activity of finding reasons does have a definite beginning and is

⁴¹BB 15.

not endless, even if the possibilities of where to begin, where we choose to divide the line, so to speak, are endless.

But Wittgenstein also warns us against coming to the opposed conclusion, namely that, accepting that reasons have a definite beginning, the first reason given must therefore be the *cause* of the chain of reasoning. He claims that once the last reason in the chain is given (proceeding backwards, as it were), and one still asks why, then we are tempted to reply with a cause and not a reason. He illustrates the difference between cause and reason this way: causes are still only hypotheses, even though they may be very good hypotheses—they imply that evidence can be gathered in order to prove or disprove them; reasons, however, can be given immediately and are akin to facts, something so obvious that we present them without a search or call for evidence. Wittgenstein goes further and claims that this confusion is exactly similar to that between motive and cause, for we can only conjecture as to causes, but we can “know” our motives. Since the question *why* is used to ask for both motives and causes, we tend to confuse the two and come to believe that motives are a secret, inner kind of cause, one to which we alone have immediate access. Our motives and our reasons come to be seen as “calculations” for our results, and like mathematics, appear to be unquestionable and purely objective. Similarly, our interpretations of texts come to be seen as the result of linguistic calculations every bit as objective and universal simply because we can answer the question why, mistakenly thinking that our “known” motives are equally known causes.

The confusion between cause and motive, as that between cause and reason, can also capture the (in Wittgenstein’s terms) nonsensicality, but felt need, of relativist,

realist, and positivist interpretations of texts, modes of interpretation which in themselves substantiate corresponding notions of “reality” (relativism, realism, etc.). For example, those wishing to describe themselves as relativists seem to be making a mistake analogous to thinking that reasons stretch to infinity. In this case, since the reasons behind every interpretative move seem to indicate yet one more, the circle never seems to close, and the text comes to be seen as infinite as the interpretations themselves.⁴² This position still considers the establishment of beliefs to be the ideal meaning of the text, but simply stipulates that each set of beliefs is as good as any other, reaching the inescapable conclusion that the text contains all possible beliefs, which does not amount to hearing the text and the discourse it shares in addressing its “about-which,” as Heidegger would say. Those wishing to describe themselves as realists or positivists seem to move in the other direction, making the mistake of believing that the ultimate reason is akin to the ultimate cause or responds to some kind of “calculus” whereby meaning is secured by “equations” whose variables are motives, the “known” causes. The ultimate cause is then the text’s “original,” “intended,” or “real” meaning. Here, too, reading is defined by a search for a message corresponding to a particular worldview (the all-encompassing view described above), but now the meaning of the text has been reduced to only one “valid” or “correct” interpretation.

The “metaphysical error” that Wittgenstein alludes to indicates a certain type of realist, one that Wittgenstein claims confuses reason with cause.⁴³ The ultimate “cause”

⁴²In chapter 4, I will explain how a text can be seen as a “bounded” infinite, however.

⁴³BB 18.

behind an interpretative move for a reader given to this kind of thinking is some kind of referent outside all language and toward which language moves but of course ultimately fails to describe or fully encompass. What anchors the interpretation for this reader is not psychological motive, but something extra-linguistic, something considered permanent and immutable. It is this which this type of reader thinks lends legitimacy to the interpretation, as opposed to “subjective” emotions, definitions, or grammar.

It is important to notice how all three types of readers discussed above misconceive language by still paying heed to Aristotle’s original idea: language is ideally both a descriptive device and a lens for “reality,” and depends therefore on an ontology of substances howsoever conceived, that language and substance coexist, as Wittgenstein describes such thinking.⁴⁴ This Aristotelian reader’s desire is that the ideal text should simply “read” itself, and the resultant interpretation would therefore be infallible, pointing to the reality “behind” the words, as it were. An error in interpretation, a reading considered “wrong” by being opposed to such a reader’s own interpretation, is almost always accounted for by the Aristotelian reader by referring to some misunderstanding, either regarding the author (misjudging the motive or intent, or, failing that, claiming that the author’s own intent is itself confused or problematic), the text (e.g., a logical error, much like a mistake in mathematical calculation), or, most seriously, the misunderstanding is due to the other reader’s misjudging the ontological structure of reality since she does not share the same linguistic assumptions. This last type of misunderstanding is the Aristotelian reader’s last resort in defending her interpretation of

⁴⁴BB 5, 17-18.

the text, her beliefs. For example, when this reader cannot convince another who has a different understanding of meaning and the text through an appeal to authorial motive, intent, and historical period (often summed up in the word “context”), or by appealing to syntax, grammar, and definitions (the “logical calculus” of language), she simply asserts that the other’s “definition” of truth is mistaken, i.e., the other does not “see” things correctly, her view of reality is warped, etc. Those who practice this type of inauthentic reading not only nullify their own chances of imagining an authentic self, but dishonor and nullify the other reader by muting her voice, in effect questioning the sanity (and possibly humanity) of another human being. Wittgenstein urges us to understand that such labels as “realist” and “relativist,” used either pejoratively or self-applied in a complimentary manner, are themselves the result of not understanding how the language game works, but it is only with a clear understanding of the language game that one can present a view of reading that Wittgenstein could endorse.

In the “Blue Book,” Wittgenstein makes some remarkable almost throwaway comments about the interpretation of signs and images.⁴⁵ Although neither language nor the text (the literary work of art, be it fiction, poetry, philosophy, sacred text, etc.), as discussed in the introduction, is simply a system of signs and symbols, Wittgenstein’s comments reveal certain facets of the activity of reading, namely that interpretation of literature, like dividing the line, is a matter of choice founded on a number of experiences, such as prior beliefs, or personal history, or most dramatically the practical considerations of why one is interpreting the text (dividing the line) in the first place. His

⁴⁵BB 3-5, 33-4.

claim that “whenever we interpret a symbol in one way or another, the interpretation is a new symbol added to the old one” (*BB* 33) amounts to saying that an interpretation never reaches bedrock, and indeed the idea that a bedrock exists in the form of final, true, or absolute meanings is itself caused by a misapprehension of language. As Wittgenstein indicates on the following page, one can always form a different model of interpretation, one which divides the line according to two different termini, as it were. Once more, just as in deciding where to divide a line of finite length, the *possibilities* of interpretation are certainly as infinite in number as the amount of readers. One can go even further and claim that our interpretations of texts, our very approaches to various texts, will more than likely change as we ourselves change during life’s course. The possibilities of interpretation are then theoretically infinite for even one individual. This indefiniteness of the possibilities of meaning only results when we authentically read the text with a desire to share and participate in communication with each other, not to force text or others into a fixed, limited, or ideal framework. It is the human being who is the interpreter, the reader, not the text. But it is also important to remember that it is the human being who is the author, and it is only in discourse (communicating, Being-with) that the possibilities of creating a meaning and transformation exist at all.

This brief summation of Wittgenstein’s view of the indefinite and indeterminate nature of interpretation helps illustrate my own idea of meaning-creation. In the context of this dissertation, meaning-creation is described as having two forms. “Thematic meaning” refers to that type of reading that purposively seeks the worth of the text through some identifiable system of beliefs or worldview. Our *first* approach to discourse

is in this mode, to find a use for the text through whatever beliefs we think it represents, and so coincides with the unreflective reading practice discussed previously. The second and more enriching form of meaning-creation (its authentic mode, to be fleshed out more fully in the next chapter) is what I have hinted at through the term “reflective reading.” It is an attunement to another person or persons, to discourse, the text, and what the text is talking about, an attuning that views the text as an artwork capable of disclosing truth. When a reader in the former mode insists that the text “means” x , this x is very often in the form of a “life lesson” or “moral,” a belief or “value” usually already held by the reader, which is meant to constrain us (both reader and others) and modify our behavior, but such a reader is often not cognizant that this interpretation itself rests on the truth of language that denies the reducibility of interpretations. Therefore thematic meaning, even though built on mistaken and “confused” conceptions of language, is still the product of the imagination, but one coupled with our (inauthentic) engagement with discourse. Meaning-creation, when understood authentically as a human activity, implies its own evolution, its own plurality.

Reflective reading, however, can also be inauthentic by still imposing, albeit knowingly, one’s worldview (the coherent set of beliefs one uses to limit the meaning of beings and Being) on the text. As noted earlier, it is indeed possible that we can come to believe that we have a solid foundation for our interpretation of a text simply because we can answer the question why for every interpretative move that is made. To be able to give a reason at every turn of the interpretative game is to think that a system is at work, that we must be “on the right track,” that our interpretation cannot be a fluke or a mistake.

This line of reasoning returns to the confusion noticed by Wittgenstein and discussed above, namely that we begin to confuse reasons and motives with causes. Reflective reading done in this manner is akin to being able to point at any part of a picture and explain why that part is in the picture. We assume the picture is a whole, that the interpretation is a whole, and under this assumption we cannot help but find reasons for every part.

To point out such confusion in reading practice is not necessarily to invalidate an interpretation that claims dominance over all other interpretations. Surely interpretations can still be “correct,” even if the reader has misconceived the activity of reading and meaning-creation, or so someone may reply. It is in this equating of correctness and truth, a type of “certainty” Wittgenstein deconstructs throughout *OC*,⁴⁶ that a reader feels she has epistemological access to a text and to its interpretation, in the sense that she feels she can discover errors and truths in an interpretation as if she were investigating a scientific hypothesis. The reader who holds to this notion of truth not only feels she “has” an interpretation of a text; she also “knows” the text and “knows” the proper interpretation of the text. The discourse that is the text is treated primarily as an object about which one can make correct and incorrect conjectures, conjectures that can be verified or disproved and shown to be erroneous. It is this treatment of a text that clears a path to dogmatism—the assumption, in effect, that all interpretations should be reducible to one,

⁴⁶Verbin, however, claims that there is no “substantial conception of certainty” in *OC*. See Verbin, “Uncertainty and Religious Belief,” 18.

which also hearkens back to the idea that language coexists with things and should reflect the “ultimate” reality.⁴⁷

The reason for the modern tendency of equating knowledge with correctness must wait for a fuller explanation in the next chapter. However, Wittgenstein in his own way inquires into why being correct should give us the sense that we have reached the bedrock of reasoning, the ultimate cause behind all our reasons, and therefore the “ultimate” or final interpretation of a text.⁴⁸ Having an aversion to facing or admitting polysemy indicates that one thinks multiplicity of meanings implies incorrect thinking or at best a kind of vagueness, an inability to narrow down the choices and get to that final cause. Truth identified as correctness implies a singularity—the correct answer to the equation is one number, not several. What Heidegger might call a “technological” approach to truth reveals that we want to use truth, to wield it, to treat everything as an object with a single use and single destiny, in short to make all things become tools for us. The idea of the tool goes hand in hand with building and the idea of progress, and the more one can use the world, the more powerful one feels one can become, the more one can predict behavior and secure one’s own position in a changing universe via those predictions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷At *CV* 26 and 28, Wittgenstein discusses both how philosophy degenerates into dogmatism and how religious dogmatism acts like a “brake” on thinking. Both forms ultimately destroy any creativity in thinking, in seeing the possibilities within a text.

⁴⁸At *CV* 16, Wittgenstein undermines the notion of a bedrock of reasons: “No reason can be given why you should act (or should have acted) *like this*, except that by doing so you bring about such and such a situation, which again has to be an aim you *accept*” (original italics).

⁴⁹Wittgenstein, too, deplored the obsession with progress so prevalent in early twentieth-century scientific enterprises and European culture: “Man has to awaken to wonder—and so perhaps do peoples. Science is a way of sending him to sleep again” (*CV* 5). And on the desire for ever more complex scientific structures: “I am not interested in constructing a building, so much as in having a perspicuous view of the foundations of possible buildings” (*CV* 7).

Predictability and security are tools of conservation, and, as will be explored further throughout the next two chapters, dogmatism in interpretation is ultimately an attempt to deny one's own mutability and the possibility of imagining a different self, an attempt to stabilize one self against the "threat" of a host of other selves.

Such a fear is an internalized form of denying and fearing other persons, and as such, the correlate of such a denial of imagining the self is to be deaf to discourse, to silence the text and those others that give voice to it by reducing meaning to a presumed immutable singularity that effaces self, text, and others in a self-destruction of creativity. Reading so misconceived as a need for and an access to a system, a worldview, reduces a text simply to a conduit for information, data akin to scientific laws, but in the form of propositional beliefs (which is not to say that such readers do not revere their texts).⁵⁰ When discourse is considered suitable only for transmitting such laws, texts are considered no more than mere descriptions of objects and concepts, and the reader's task is only to discern whether the text is a good (correct) description or a bad one.⁵¹ This technological transformation of language means that one denies meaning can respond to change or evolve and instead asserts (mistakenly) that a-contextual meaning is possible and is no longer equivalent to a word's use in the language game. Instead, such a

⁵⁰For more on how language is not and should not be reduced to a simple flow of information, see Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought*, 107, 562. Wittgenstein also denies that art, in our case a text, is simply about the transfer of information. At *CV* 4, he says: "But only an artist can so represent an individual thing as to make it appear to us like a work of art...A work of art forces us—as one might say—to see it in the right perspective but, in the absence of art, the object is just a fragment of nature like any other." The text that is a work of art moves beyond the desire simply to possess information and actually de-objectifies its "subject." To treat the text as a simple guidebook for a better life, or as a list of ethical precepts, as so many religious texts are treated, is to become deaf to the text as art.

⁵¹Again, I will expand on this further in the next chapter, but readers conversant with Heidegger's work should recognize my indebtedness here to his "The Question Concerning Technology."

mistaken view of language must assume that words are meant to attach to things as labels, to correspond to some object, and that these things and objects are the “true” meanings of the words themselves, meanings that exist prior to discourse and prior to text.

Alternatively, some readers of this sort see the multiplicity of meanings as an indication of language’s inherent unreliability as a tool in the search for the ultimate reality. It becomes then the responsibility of this type of reader to clarify language by properly attaching predicates to subjects in order to convey accurately ultimate reality, thereby producing the correct description of this totality and thus eliminating doubt, which is defined as the product of error and imprecise vision, as it were. Polysemy is considered to be either the cause or the result of vagueness and ambiguity in language, as well as the foe of “true” meaning, and so something to be lessened and possibly (ideally) exterminated. For this reader, contexts are considered helpful only as rigid frames of reference the only purpose of which is to guide the reader to the “correct” interpretation (e.g., Austin and Grice seem to consider contexts to have precisely this function, as if speakers in every instance had to whittle down an infinity of meanings in order to communicate with their audience). Such a view of texts denies that they are discourse, a human practice that makes possible the revelation of truth, and it instead posits that the reader’s only duty is to observe and report on reality (already predefined as something static and waiting to be discovered) through the “proper” interpretation of the text. To echo Sartre, such positivism is the claim that the unknowable “falls outside” humanity.⁵² The positivist version of language is a language that “knows” the truth by equating it with

⁵²Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, 2.

being verifiably correct, and all that is “unknowable” or unverifiable must be ejected from the language. So results, for example, Russell’s rejection of the use of “God” or any name with which we are “unacquainted,” essentially the rejection of all “mystical” and “poetic” elements within the language game.⁵³

Wittgenstein rejects this idea that language exists only in order to give us epistemological access to some “external” reality, and instead demonstrates that language is a game powered by desires, ethical concerns, and the impossibility of a finality of meaning.⁵⁴ The view of language held by, for example, the logical positivists is what Wittgenstein refers to when he uses the term “metaphysics,” a term meant to describe a way of thinking that inquires into language in the form of scientific (better understood as perhaps “scientistic,” the assertion that reality is composed only of material objects with verifiable properties) questions, as if language were nothing more than some stable object that can be observed, measured, tested, and against which our hypotheses can be verified or disproved.⁵⁵ On the contrary, language is a living practice, an evolving practice, for it is the thinking of living and evolving beings, and the “essence” of language is a sharing communication with each other; this is the “good” of language, not a “weakness” or shadow of “reality.” We must assert, against all such positivist understandings of

⁵³As quoted in James Baillie, ed., *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 26: “Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted.” And of course this meant empirically verifiable, not intuited in any psychical or spiritual sense.

⁵⁴Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction* claims that Wittgenstein was not out to build a system of rules regarding language or to extol certain theories of language—see 13, 39, and 137.

⁵⁵Cf. *BB* 35: metaphysical questions are characterized by expressing “an unclarity about the grammar of words in the *form* of a scientific question” (original italics).

language and texts, that it is a misapprehension of language to think that it either reaches or fails to reach an ultimate reality that will bring an end to meaning and interpretation, that the felt need for this ultimate reality is due to this misapprehension. The language game is neither exhausted nor summarized by its use as description, as such “scientific” theories seem to assume, though description can be, and often is, a perfectly legitimate use. The power of the literary work of art, especially a religious text, is therefore not in its putative infallible access to an unquestionable reality, to the mind of God as it were.⁵⁶ The responsibility of reading and interpreting remains firmly with the reader, not with the text as “interpreting” itself either as a correct or incorrect (as judged by the reader, of course) account of how things really are, even if the text does present just such an account. The text is better understood as the discourse of the author, artwork that discloses the truth of what it talks about. But this disclosure, as Heidegger will point out and will be explained in the next chapter, is not a mere description of an entity “outside” the text, but clears the way for the dis-covery of beings themselves, not as objects, and thereby the “working” of Being. It is from this disclosure, from beings themselves, that the text calls to us, and the author’s role is to let us hear the call of language and Being by speaking forth as the text her own interpretation of existence; our role as readers is to respond by listening to this call, and in so doing take responsibility for our own creation of meaning

⁵⁶In other words, God in speaking still uses a human language. As retold by Umberto Eco, in the late 1700s, Antoine Court de Gébelin also claimed that “when God spoke first to human beings, he had to use a language that they could understand, because it was a product of their own.” Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 94.

Part III. Reading and Believing

If in life we are surrounded by death, so too in the health of our intellect we are surrounded by madness.

Wittgenstein

It is a great temptation to try to make the spirit explicit.

Wittgenstein

Uttering a word is like striking the keyboard of the imagination.

Wittgenstein

Beliefs about the text and the worlds of both author and reader are part of the reader's response to an engagement with the literary work of art. Many of these beliefs are profound expressions of idealized behavior, moral codes that one "lives by." However, to claim that one "lives by" a belief is to use "believe" in a way that signals neither supposition nor speculation, and is equivalent to an assertion of the predicate, that is, one can simply drop "I believe" in these sorts of statements, leaving intact the moral code itself.⁵⁷ But this use of "I" and "believe" can lead to the "believer" thinking she conforms all her activity to a code of conduct, as if accompanying each and every action is a proposition beginning with the phrase, "I believe..." Wittgenstein severely criticizes this "subject-centered" use of "believe" as leading to a mistaken view of certainty that in its turn seems to indicate an ultimate reality to which we can have access through language and which will finalize all interpretations, in sum leaving us as enforcers of our

⁵⁷Phillips makes a similar claim, arguing that "I believe..." statements usually do not give us information regarding a "mental state" but are a way of "asserting" something. See Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, 36.

respective dogmas.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Wittgenstein points out that we have an intuitive understanding of the possibility of dropping “I believe” in such statements and of their real character as assertions. This is part of what Wittgenstein means when he claims that “the word ‘I’ does not mean the same as ‘L.W.’ even if I am L.W., nor does it mean the same as the expression ‘the person who is now speaking.’ But that doesn’t mean: that ‘L.W.’ and ‘I’ mean different things. All it means is that these words are different instruments in our language” (*BB* 67).⁵⁹ As assertions, these statements can be said by anyone, and the only special connection between the assertion and the “I” is the speaker’s identifying with such an assertion, the desire for her audience not only to accept the truth of the speaker’s statement but to be able to predict the speaker’s own behavior. But as Wittgenstein points out in *OC*, the most dangerous confusion that arises is that belief statements can feel and even look like knowledge statements, statements characterized by certainty, because of their assertive quality. Once again, this misconception of language tempts us to think that there is a deep, “inner” connection between “my” language and an “external” world. We are enticed into thinking that the certainty with which we often talk

⁵⁸For example: *OC* 59: analyzing the proposition “I know” will not prove realism; 155: “can” is able to be used in what Wittgenstein calls a “logical” mode—that is, one is able to say something opposed to one of the sentences that forms the architecture of our language game, but this is not considered a mistake (“false” belief) but a symptom of insanity; 308: “I am inclined to believe that not everything that has the form of an empirical proposition *is* one” (original italics); 367: placing “know” and “believe” in the same category means that we condemn someone just as much for being wrong if they claim to know something and do not as we do for someone who has “false” beliefs; and 519: “knowing” what a book is, for example, rests on other things that are beyond doubt—but there is no way to claim that one particular instance is representative of being beyond doubt, but is only so “as a rule.” This is one more way of saying that leaping from language to an ontology of substances is a wrong move.

⁵⁹He says something very similar, if in truncated form, at *OC* 42. The point here is not to think in terms of an ontology of substances or objects. Not every word implies an object, but every word has a use, a different application (practice). I should say, however, that one can indeed use the sentence “I believe” stressing the “I,” i.e. as if it were a “demonstrative,” differentiating one person from among many.

is directly caused by how the world “really” is. As a result, we are no longer in awe of entities, no longer question the meaning of Being as Heidegger might say, but are only in awe of the self-as-subject, the thing that has putative power over the entities because it asserts their existence. The ultimate and ongoing task for this subject is to enumerate the objects, including texts and language in general, and to determine their worth.

I am not saying (nor is Wittgenstein) that there is no such thing as the “subject” of a sentence or that language cannot be used descriptively to illustrate or talk about things. The focus here is on the grammar (as Wittgenstein uses that term) of the words “belief” and “believe,” and how they are used with regard to reading and interpreting texts. What is in question here is that particular interpretation of a text that has evolved into ethical guidance for the reader in the form of “rules” of behavior, a doctrine, or a dogma, the conveyance of which is considered to be the text’s true purpose, rules that are themselves thought to be the cause of a reader’s subsequent ideas and actions. The argument throughout this chapter has been that listening to discourse by reading authentically and the concomitant construction of meaning are not matters of cause and effect, like one billiard ball striking another, and do not conform to the ontology that supports such a technological view of reading and discourse.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Kathrin Stengel, citing Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, claims that ethics and aesthetics cannot be fitted into “propositions” and therefore are not “subject matters” of philosophy. They are instead “an intrinsic part of the philosophical performance itself.” It is in “the philosopher’s style...in and through the aesthetic quality of philosophical discourse, that the veneer of logic peels off to give way to philosophy as ethical practice” (612-13). She continues by claiming that “propositions” are “pictures” of reality and therefore true or false, but “value statements” do not “depict reality” but only give a perspective. She claims this being beyond propositional language is what Wittgenstein meant by claiming ethics were “inexpressible.” It seems to me that Wittgenstein’s later criticism of his own early work and pictorial theory of language completely undermines Stengel’s thesis. Irrespective of this, however, Stengel herself makes questionable claims about “neutral propositions,” “universal law,” “expression” of “eternity,” and “intellectual synthesis,” all of which seem to me very far from Wittgenstein’s own philosophy. See Kathrin Stengel, “Ethics as Style:

As described earlier, Wittgenstein teaches us how considering a motive to be a secret, “inner cause” to which we alone have access leads to a mistaken view of knowledge.⁶¹ The sense of knowledge here, of my feeling I necessarily have to “know” why I committed some action, Wittgenstein calls a “logical” use of the word “know,” much like he will describe Moore’s statement of “I know this is my hand.”⁶² Such a use does not imply knowledge in the verifiable sense, but describes a foundational structure of the language game. In short, it is something that one could never fail to “know.” Just as motives are not a form of spontaneous “knowledge,” Wittgenstein denies that behavior is a caused activity, as if a person’s actions could be explained as definite output of a certain kind of input (language in this case), even though said person most certainly has her reasons and her motives.⁶³ So considered, interpreting a text can never make that text a determinative cause of further thinking (even though we are often given to such phrasing as “I think/believe *x because* I read *y*”) but only one more reason or motive, and so the reader remains responsible for any belief deemed inspired by the text. The activity

Wittgenstein's Aesthetic Ethics and Ethical Aesthetics," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 611-15, 617-18.

⁶¹Once again, *BB* 15.

⁶²*OC* 250: having two hands is as certain as anything that could be given as evidence for so having—therefore seeing two hands counts as no evidence; 462: Wittgenstein censures Moore for adducing as knowledge something most everyone knows, not just Moore himself—this shows how foundational to the language game Moore’s propositions are, that they are wrongly called “knowledge”; 523: if there is no possibility of doubt, as with certain propositions, then there is nothing called “knowledge” in this instance; 534: learning a language is not knowing certain things, but being able to do certain things—543 is a good example of this; and finally, 550: we do not always have to answer “why” we believe something, but we do have to be able to explain how we know something. I think that, with regard to reading, if we confuse believing and knowing in this way, we will be tempted to answer why we believe with the same certainty as if we know something, i.e., we will make believing equivalent to knowing.

⁶³Stern, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations: An Introduction*, 86-7 also denies that Wittgenstein was a behaviorist.

of authentic meaning-creation and belief-construction only ends “when” and “where” readers decide that it must, analogous to Wittgenstein’s example of where to begin and end dividing the line.

Even that interpretation of a text that is nothing more than a search for beliefs, to enhance, supplant, or substantiate those that we consider to guide our everyday actions, is a thing *made* (poiesis: a making, a forming) through an engagement with the text, in conversing (as David Tracy would say) with others, even though reducing reading to such an exercise remains an inauthentic practice. The literary work of art is always this discourse, even if unheard and misappropriated along the lines discussed in this chapter. Wittgenstein’s conception of language, however, helps us also understand that interpretations, although unique, are not arbitrary products of the reader. The reader does not simply declare what a text says or means at whim, even if she claims to do so, but is bound to the discourse and to the communicants in the discourse, the self-reader with all her experiences, memories, quirks, etc. and the other-author who calls to the reader through what is being talked about in the discourse. But to read authentically is to be sensitive to this binding, is to hear the text and make possible a coming-to-be of the self, a creating of the self through the text. As we will see more clearly in chapter 3, both reader and author in a very important way *are* this discourse, the truth that uncovers beings and shows the working of Being in both self and others, reader and author.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Cf. Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought*, 156-7: “Well, there is literally nothing ‘between’ language and the world. That means, first, that there is no veil or gap between language and the world, as though language had to penetrate a distorting medium, or traverse any distance, in order to reach the world. It also means that there is absolutely nothing ‘going on’ between language and the world—no traffic, or congress, or exchange, or, in general, any ‘relationship’ between the two. *Neither* language *nor* the world is some kind of object independent of, but having relationships to, other objects” (original italics).

Reading grants us the opportunity to exercise this unique mode of being.

Engaging the literary work, searching for a meaning, is a reflective exercise similar to reviewing one's accumulated memories and trying to organize one's past, to identify one's own self. Literary works of art are very much like memories, someone else's memories that we inhabit for a while, and in "living" that narrative, we are in the reflective mode. As we read, we are assembling the meaning of the text, our own unique and imaginative engagement with discourse that will become our interpretation of the text. In this sense, reading and interpreting the text are one and the same activity. If at a later reading of the same text one comes to a different interpretation, this bespeaks being a completely different reader who has restructured the self in the interim. The power of literary art is not in affecting every reader in exactly the same way, but in continually affecting readers, inspiring them to reread and come to a new understanding of self and world, in Heideggerian terms, the truth of Being.

One final reiteration before moving on to chapter three and the thought of Sartre and Heidegger: one of Wittgenstein's most resounding and common themes is the calling into question of the necessity of "mental processes" accompanying discourse.⁶⁵ He readily explains how we are enticed into looking for a "shadow object" when referents seem non-existent, or assuming that a connection solidly exists between words and their referents as long as we can safely point to those referents. What should be clear

⁶⁵See *BB* 32-41; also *PI* 170-1: on the "hidden" connection between meaning and reading; 293: the beetle-in-the-box problem; and 304 and 306: language is not about conveying some "inner" thoughts or feelings to a purely external world, which is not to deny mental processes but a certain way of thinking about how language functions.

throughout this chapter is an attempt to clarify similar confusions regarding the reading and interpreting of texts. Just as in spoken discourse, there is no need to assume that some special mental process must accompany the activity of reading, a mental process called “interpreting.” The poiesis of the interpretation of a text is the imaginative engagement with that text, is the very process of reading the text itself. The next step in understanding the practice of reading is differentiating when this practice is authentic from an inauthentic form, and what such an authenticity implies regarding truth and the human being.

Chapter 3: Poiesis: The Imaginative Production of Worlds and Hermeneutical Responsibility

Part I. Introduction: An Overview of Heidegger's Concepts of Truth and Language

For that, which I want to present, is very difficult and dark, where no experience is there.
St. Theresa

Wittgenstein demonstrates that meaning arises, generally speaking, through how a word is used and not through any form of agreement between word and thing, captured in the word's "representing" said thing. Furthermore, he shows how words are not akin to pictures of objects nor do their meanings correspond to objects, as if pointing to a chair fulfilled in every instance the meaning of the word "chair." Wittgenstein's investigations into language thus reveal the shortcomings of descriptive theories of language and their assertion that "true" meaning corresponds to some definite object or to an accurate description or representation of some definite object. A further result of Wittgenstein's work is that the meaning of a sentence or proposition cannot be logically calculated as correct correspondence between predicates and their subjects. Indeed, the whole notion of absolute subjects and predicates as the key to meaning is called into question by Wittgenstein's language games. Hidden within this deconstruction of the proposition is the calling into question of a propositional theory of truth, that the "real" meaning of a sentence, its "truth value," lies in the correct assignation of predicates to a subject, a unit that itself should, under the theory, correspond to another object outside the sentence.

Once more, we are faced with the prospect of labeling, that the function of language and meaning is to lie over the surface of an object as it were, correctly conveying that object's essence and properties via words to users of the language. Contrary to such a view, Wittgenstein's concept of language implies that the "truth" of a statement is a "function" of its place within the larger architecture of the language game, how the statement itself is being used, an understanding of which is as important as knowing how individual words are used (i.e., what they mean).

As can be seen by my use of quotation marks in the preceding paragraph, to claim that the meaning of a word is its use in a language in general, in a sentence specifically, is to question the generally accepted notions of the "real," the subject, the object, and truth. As described in my introduction, Heidegger directly takes up these concepts and deconstructs them as integral components of what he calls both "metaphysics" and "calculative thinking," that sort of reasoning that holds in thrall the modern technological age. In this chapter, I will use the thought of both Heidegger and Sartre to explore the essence of reading and how the practice of reading is intimately tied to the response of the reader in the form of *poiesis*, the imaginative activity of meaning-creation (*poiesis*: a making or building of something). In reading the text, readers are responsible for their interpretations, but we should hear the term "responsibility" etymologically, that is, as the ability to respond, to answer for something and to something, namely the call of the author structured as text. In demonstrating how the text calls to us, I will examine (1) how the reader's self is called into question through appropriating and understanding the text, (2) the deconstruction of the reader as subject and the text as object, and (3) the new

concept of truth that shows both text and poiesis transcend any concept of object, as well as any concept of correspondence with an object. This will provide the framework for chapter 4, where I will show that poiesis is an activity that relies on Nothing, that meaning-creation is grounded on meaninglessness, the inexpressible.¹

Although I will be relying heavily on Heidegger's later essays regarding language and the work of art, I will also take into account his earlier thoughts regarding language in *Being and Time* (hereafter *BT*), thoughts that would become fleshed out in his later work. When appropriate, I will point out connections between Heidegger's thought and Wittgenstein's, or between Heidegger's and Sartre's, but the purpose of this dissertation is not to synthesize the thinking of these three philosophers. These three thinkers have vastly different goals, methods, and assumptions, but, as explained in the introduction, each one offers an integral viewpoint on the activity of reading and the being of the reader. Where Wittgenstein is more interested in the practice of discourse as spoken language, and rarely specifically discusses the interpretation of texts or the founding of beliefs through reading, Heidegger and Sartre discuss how the human being is in part discourse and imaginatively engages the discourse of others. It is in harnessing intent and desire that we come to sense our own identity and to place that identity, at least in part, in

¹Although the connection between meaninglessness and inexpressibility will be most fully explored at the end of this chapter and throughout the next, I should reiterate here some thoughts from the introduction. I understand discourse to be something proffered to us listeners/readers, but discourse itself also offers or discloses another entity or entities in talking about those entities. As both something proffered by another and a revelation of beings, discourse (the text) speaks or calls to us, i.e., is not something we ourselves have spoken nor something simply waiting to be spoken by anyone. It is this uniqueness that makes it inexpressible or "unsayable," that is, meaningless or unusable in Wittgensteinian terms, until we hear and appropriate it by taking it up in turn. Only then do we engage in the game and have the opportunity to interpret the text in our own unique way.

our reading of texts, the beliefs we feel to be influenced and defended by the texts we read and with which we agree. Valuing a text merely because we feel it affirms or confirms our present beliefs, implying that reading is simply a search for texts we like, is what must ultimately give way after a proper understanding of poiesis.

To further ground conceiving poiesis as the active construction of meaning through an engagement with another's discourse, I will very much rely on Heidegger's notions of "talk" (*Rede*) and "communication" (*Mitteilung*), outlined in *BT*, as a way of exploring different notions of what a text is. From this perspective, a text is a form of discourse, a communication between author and reader that talks "about" something (but as stated in section 2 of the introduction, not every discourse takes the form of a text, which throughout this dissertation signifies a literary work of art). Furthermore, as will be explained throughout this chapter, the human being, *Dasein*, is the locus of meaning for she exists as being-uncovering, or that which discloses, what Heidegger will contend is the essence of truth. Disclosure is the basis of other truths (such as a description agreeing with what is described), that is, it allows something to be seen and about which we can talk by bringing it to expression through language. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is always "in-the-truth" and "in-the-untruth," and since the nature of discourse is disclosure, i.e., what the human being herself is, *Dasein* is in one important respect discourse and therefore is the text itself. The human being then "has" meaning in the most profound of ways, not the way an entity met within the world can "have" a meaning such that we can reduce that meaning to one interpretation according to our desires or whims. *Dasein* is always projecting (and in this way always "true"), and this dynamic self cannot be

reduced to a single meaning without sacrificing an understanding of the human being as always “being-true” by being-with-others, i.e., without sacrificing a better understanding of self. The text, therefore, also cannot legitimately be reduced to one single “correct” interpretation, though it is very important to realize what Heidegger himself points out, namely that our *first* encounter with discourse (texts) is as just another object within the world, one which we approach as merely useful or within our realm of control. It is realizing and avoiding this misstep with respect to texts that is the goal of this chapter.

Throughout this chapter, I will be using Heidegger’s work on discourse and truth to help construct a hermeneutics of reading and explain how we come to create a meaning for a text. Briefly put, if the text is understood as a communication, a sharing-with that lets things appear (the same kind of disclosure that Dasein itself is), then an *authentic* hearing of the text results in a thorough re-envisioning of the self and the “faculty” of the imagination, that is, creativity itself. In the reading of a text, in that sharing, the imagination is reaching out projecting possibilities of Being, in essence *forming* the self. If we choose not to hear the text, however, as is our first orientation toward discourse (it is simply “there” in the world, like a chair or a tree), we will mistakenly assume the text to be simply an object the meaning of which is either totally within the power of the reader (who assigns the text a meaning as if assigning a property to an object) or completely within the power of the author, “inside” the text itself (the meaning of which now requires a “key,” for example, the author’s intention or a theory of language that will reduce all possible interpretations ideally to the “real” or “best” one, or to at least the set of the most acceptable interpretations). These two forms of inauthentic reading share a

common assumption, namely, the interpretation of a text is primarily a matter of being correct in what one asserts of it. “Bad” interpretations are “wrong,” i.e., incorrect. As I will make clear below, Heidegger helps us understand how such an interest in correctness modifies what we think truth itself is. Changing what I consider to be mistaken views of reading texts, especially sacred texts, is the focus of this dissertation, and to this end I will be arguing throughout this chapter for a putting aside of the subject-object distinction and the notion of truth that equates truth with correctness, ways of thinking that make reading nothing more than a search for right beliefs and/or a validation of beliefs already held.

While readers may indeed come away from a text with a new belief, what I have termed the “thematic reading” of a text (its “worth,” a reply to the question “why read this text?”), this activity itself is built on the ground of sharing discourse, of questioning the self, the momentary crisis caused by meeting the inexpressible: we cannot express what is the other half of this “conversation” as it were between reader and author, but must first listen to it. To listen authentically is to hear the text’s call, to be attuned to the “about-which” of the text, to be “in” the truth. But the danger of not listening, of an inauthentic hearing that attempts to mute the text and measure all its possible interpretations according to some preconceived standard of correctness, a standard that ideally reduces all interpretations to one, always remains. To evaluate the text in this manner not only ignores the humanity of the author by making her a mere mouthpiece for propositional beliefs from some beyond, but as a turning away from truth, also depredates the reader’s own humanity.

Part I.1: Truth and Self According to Heidegger

Heidegger contends that the contemporary understanding of “truth,” “knowledge,” and “discourse” is radically skewed and incomplete because it favors only one understanding of reality, one that lacks any understanding of Being.² To question the traditionally unquestioned assumption that truth is the correctness of judgments, and therefore the correctness of propositions, an assumption that Heidegger claims is the essence of Plato’s revolution in thinking, Heidegger himself returns to the essence of language as revealing activity, that which uncovers or dis-covers. Briefly stated, this bringing out of hiding is the unique activity of human beings (Dasein) and is the essence or ground of truth (meaning that other forms of truth, i.e., correspondence or agreement, are not wrong but simply secondary and derivative). It is only because of this grounding in revelation that language can be used for “traditional,” analytic purposes, such as synthesizing judgments, describing referents, locating the properties of objects, etc. Heidegger’s notion of truth, however, does not mean that a person simply “makes up” the truth, as the solipsist might assert, for such “making up” would still fall within the boundaries of the concept of truth as agreement or correct judgment, but now one simply defined by the subject as opposed to the object (an admittedly grossly oversimplified description of the realist-relativist distinction). Instead, Heidegger contends that human beings become the locus of understanding of all other “entities” without “relativizing”

²This claim is made repeatedly throughout Heidegger’s corpus, but for examples see BT 56-8, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1977), “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

those entities to themselves.³ Heidegger's rejecting the idea that truth is only possible in the activity of judging or in correct use of logical operators is in agreement with Wittgenstein in that Wittgenstein too rejects the test of logic as a valid measure of a proposition's meaning, its "truth," just as he rejects the positivists' assertion that a word's meaning is its verifiable referent.⁴ From the point of view of both thinkers, then, language has its own truth that is grounded on what language itself is, not on the fact that language can indeed be used to describe things.

Understanding this relationship between truth and language directly affects how one creates meanings or beliefs with regard to the text, and how one understands the activity of reading in general, by sidestepping Dasein's *primary* attitude toward texts as either being true or false, and consequently of great or little value. Approaching the text as truthful in its revelation of a situation places the reader in the mode of engagement, an active listening that overcomes the initial urge to set the text within a system of beliefs and thereby either be avoided, ignored, or accepted as true (i.e., correct, right, good,

³BT 34, 56-7.

⁴Cf. Charles Altieri, who claims that if one wants to say that language is "arbitrary" or untruthful, one is forced to look outside language toward some "certainty." See Charles Altieri, "Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory," *Modern Language Notes* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1416-17. As just one example of the kind of thinking Heidegger is critiquing here, Klaus Butzenberger in a study of Indian philosophy flatly states that "it is impossible for something non-existent to appear in a cognition" (391). In his interpretation of Indian philosophy, he supports a referential theory of meaning and correspondence theory of truth, but he admits that Indian philosophers soon figured out that "there were more words than things" and therefore limited correspondence to "ethico-religious concerns" (392). Butzenberger also points out the burden laid on such theorists: they must choose a method whereby "empty terms" are chosen and "eliminated." He makes the further claim that ideas regarding mistakes or doubt begin as "basic experiences" that become "formalized" via epistemological theories. See Klaus Butzenberger, "On Doubting What There Is Not: The Doctrine of Doubt and the Reference of Terms in Indian Grammar, Logic, and Philosophy of Language," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 24 (August 1996): 391-3.

justified). Such acceptance, however, is still not authentic listening, for the text is simply imputed with whatever beliefs one assumes it is already in agreement, a circularity that actually avoids the practice of reading altogether. Heidegger sees being engaged in a situation, the practice of understanding⁵ something as something, as a basic ontological structure of Dasein, what he terms *Auslegung*, generally translated as “interpretation.” Heidegger himself differentiates between this term, however, and the other German term *Interpretation*, the latter being a more “systematic” form, the type applied, for example, to the reading of texts in an academic setting.⁶ At BT 89, Heidegger elaborates on *Auslegung* as a “dwelling alongside things” in the absence of manipulating them. To do so is to “address” our environment and “consummate” perception, to understand something as something. Seen in these terms, this form of interpretation occurs on the pre-reflective plane and is not something that requires our consent or anythetic consciousness.⁷ It is from this perspective that Heidegger develops his notion of understanding, how “Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities.” Adding to this,

⁵I will explain later in this paragraph how Heidegger links understanding with interpretation, but I should point out here as well his own differentiation between what he calls the “existential-hermeneutical as” and the “apophantical as” (BT 201). The former is an interpretation “without words” (BT 200), our way of engaging what is around us so that a world can arise, our having to do with things in concerned activity. The apophantical as depends on this more “primordial” interpretation, and is our way of expressing our understanding of properties of objects, for example. Via this form of understanding, something becomes an “about-which” and able to be characterized by assertions (BT 200). I will elaborate on this distinction on page 10 below. One can distinguish two triads: *Auslegung* - hermeneusis - ontological; *Interpretation* - assertion - ontic.

⁶BT 19, footnote 3.

⁷I am here following Macquarrie and Robinson, and the standard translation of both these terms (two separate words in German) with the English “interpretation.” Macquarrie and Robinson do, however, capitalize the latter when they translate the German *Interpretation* in order to remind the reader that there are two distinct terms in German. On a separate note, see the end of this chapter for a brief discussion of Sartre’s notions of pre-reflective and non-thetic consciousness.

Heidegger states that “the projecting of the understanding has its own possibility—that of developing itself. This development of the understanding we call ‘interpretation’ [*Auslegung*]” (BT 188). What is described in these citations is a perpetual and self-perpetuating process in the unreflective mode (what Sartre would term non-positional or non-thetic consciousness), one with a double implication: that a world is structured via interpretation and that this interpretation does not reply to a robust form of subjectivity that would require constant self-reflection (in terms of the subject-ego) in order to enact interpretation (though one could make a connection between conscious reflection and the more systematic *Interpretation*). On 189, Heidegger deepens the concept of *Auslegung* by emphasizing that understanding does not “arise” from interpretation and that interpretation is not some gathering of information regarding the interpretand. In other words, this is not a “scientific” enterprise or a tool for qualifying or explaining objects, nor is it a schematic representation of something in order to understand that thing. Finally, interpretation is the “working-out of possibilities projected in understanding.” It is very much an activity, but an unplanned and uncalculated activity, not something chosen in itself as one way to be among many. There is an echo here of what Heidegger in some earlier works calls *Lebensdasein*, translated as “factual life existence,” something accomplished in the “midst” of Dasein’s existence.⁸

Adopting Heidegger’s nuanced concept of interpretation, texts automatically, then, have a structure of significance in that we take them as something, as an entity that

⁸Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. John Sallis, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *Studies in Continental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 36.

offers the possibility of meaning. Thematic reading, whereby we structure the meaning of a text for ourselves, is very often reflective, that is, it becomes an “about-which,” an object for our assertions (see note 5), but the ground of such reading is revealed to be the unreflective mode of interpretation (*Auslegung*). Heidegger claims that this mode, this projecting of an “as-structure” over something, is “existential,” by which he means that it does not need either verbalized or some other way of expressed judgment in order to be.⁹ In this sense, interpretation “adds” neither signification nor value to something, nor is it explicit.¹⁰ What is important to see here is that meaning-creation essentially does not rely on (a concept of) subjectivity understood as the source of the will that makes decisions regarding external objects, in this case, texts. We must therefore overturn our primary and traditional response to the text as an object with an identifiable meaning or meanings that we should judge true or false, identification of which becomes the sole concern of the reader conceived as a subject. This confrontational model of reading is dissolved through an understanding of our situatedness with the text, for through such understanding the text is now seen to offer us the possibility of meaning-creation, and reading becomes the

⁹BT 190. In the words of David Klemm, Gianni Vattimo has this to say about “as-structure”: “To the extent that hermeneutics conceives of the as-structure of understanding as a transcendental condition of the possibility of experiencing truth, rather than as a contingent opening within the changing history of being, hermeneutics remains caught in the very metaphysics of presence that it purportedly negates.” See David E. Klemm, “Depth Hermeneutic and the Literary Work of Art: Religious Tradition, Hermeneutic Theory and Nihilism,” in *The Sacred and the Profane: Contemporary Demands on Hermeneutics*, ed. Jeffrey F. Keuss (Hants, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 79. If hermeneutics does indeed conceive itself as uncovering a “condition” that transcends us in the traditional sense, then it certainly manifests the very metaphysics it hopes to deny, but I do not think Heidegger is in any way urging us to conceive of the as-structure in this way. A thinker like Edward Casey, however, denies this structure out of hand: “We must also deny to imagining any element of ‘interpretation,’ as in Heidegger’s notion of the ‘existential-hermeneutical “as.””” See Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 96.

¹⁰BT 190.

mode whereby those possibilities of Being are realized. In this authentic engagement with the text, reading becomes a confluence of reader and author cradled in language, i.e., the text itself, and in such a realization of the possibilities illumined by the text, the reader grasps the chance to construct an authentic self, to understand and be understood in what the text discloses.

To say that interpretation insofar as it is always involved in understanding is not explicit does not mean that we cannot consciously reflect on what a text may mean and in doing so perhaps force an interpretation onto a text—indeed, the fact that we can do so is itself based on a structure that would found the ego-subjectivity, not on the absence of that structure. Heidegger’s concept of interpretation does not mean, however, that interpretation is a “magical” activity, the result of the workings of an unconscious or subconscious mind. The hermeneutic imagination is very much a part of the reader’s “awareness,” so much so that a reader’s claim to a text’s meaning seems inviolable to the reader herself. But this does not diminish the fact that reading is essentially a poetic process, grounded in the truth of language, the existential activity of interpretation, and a dislocation of the subject and object, even if a mistaken understanding of reading ignores its creativity and asserts the subject-object distinction. This dislocating of interpretation from the prison of self-consciousness reveals that the reader responds to the text via meaning-creation that places the “I” itself in jeopardy. In other words, reading engages us with another and her language, making explicit the finitude of the “I” and calling into question the putatively isolated and secure modern subject-ego. The reader may respond to such a crisis by listening and grasping the opportunity to achieve authentic self-hood,

but more often responds by silencing the author through various means, the most subtle of which is to reduce the possible interpretations of a text to something the reader already agrees with, but conceiving such reduction as a revelation of the text's universal status, its absolute truth and worthiness to be read. Without explicit expression, the "who" of the reader is called into question in the very act of reading, and a crisis of identity begins that is resolved, albeit only temporarily, by the responsive act of poiesis. The reader's poetic response finds its source "behind" the reader as it were, for the reader conceived as subject has no resources on which to rely for authentic meaning, not even the text conceived as object. As object, it is "mere words." As discourse, however, the text is both the author's response to Being and itself elicits a response in a call that exceeds, as it were, the text being reduced to a mere entity with words as its parts, for to call into question subjects and objects as reality's basis is to stop conceiving of reality or existence only in terms of beings. The non-being (*das Nicht-seiende*) that is no-thing is, as Heidegger will claim, "housed" by language. As the ground of all language, it has no ground itself, has no meaning, and it is from this meaninglessness that the reader responds to the text and so makes possible the forming of an authentic self that shelters and "preserves" the text.¹¹

¹¹BT 193-194: "The meaning of Being can never be contrasted with entities, or with Being as the 'ground' which gives entities support; for a 'ground' becomes accessible only as meaning, even if it is itself the abyss of meaninglessness." Jesús Escudero asserts that Heidegger's tone is "messianic and mystical," yet his notion of Being does not force us to be irrational, but "preflexive," "prerational," and ultimately "se prescinde de toda envoltura verbal." See Jesús Adrián Escudero, "Sartre, Heidegger y la disolución de la filosofía de la subjetividad," *Diálogos: revista del Departamento de Filosofía, Universidad de Puerto Rico* 38, no. 82 (2003): 186-7. Escudero's last statement I think goes a bit too far, for it seems to defy language altogether and forget that language is the "house of Being." Heidegger would of course agree that Being (or beings for that matter) cannot simply be "labeled" as if they could be merely defined or described through the attachment of predicates.

As an existential structure, interpretation is the “how” of our existence. This means that a world is understood through our interpretation, that how things are “involved” in the world is “disclosed” in our understanding of that world.¹² Once something is understood, we say that it has a meaning (*Sinn*), but not because we understood “the” meaning of what is in question, but have come to an understanding of the being.¹³ We can see here an echo of Wittgenstein in that the meaning of a word cannot be asserted a priori but only when that word is used. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger deny the objecthood or priority of meanings, insisting that meanings are not “properties” of things, and so also deny that only one “true” or “correct” meaning exists among a host of deceptions.¹⁴ Instead of “use,” Heidegger asserts that meanings are “articulations” that disclose an understanding of beings, allowing such understanding to be expressed. Only within this “structure of significance” (wherein Dasein discovers beings), Heidegger continues, can a being be said to “have” meaning, to be “intelligible” (*BT* 193). Because Dasein alone is this “moment” of understanding, Heidegger claims that only Dasein can rightfully be said to be meaningful (*sinnvoll*). Transferred to the textual environment, Heidegger’s concept of existential interpretation reveals the text is “made” to be understood by the meaning we give to it, a meaning interconnected with all other meanings in our world. The text, then, offers itself as meaningful, as able to be understood, but like all entities, its possibilities of meaning are limited only by how a

¹²*BT* 191.

¹³*Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 193.

particular reader engages its world. However, as the interpretation of Dasein and Dasein's disclosing of a world, the text has the further ability to call to us within our own primordial language (what Heidegger calls the "house of Being," language as unconcealment), and so allows us to come to a deeper appreciation of self and others. The literary work of art provokes ("calls forth") the reader to find, and desire to find, possibilities for understanding (interpreting) the text, possibilities that we will later see to be defined by the concept of care.¹⁵

But I by no means want to ignore the reflective process of reading, a process very often evident in the reading of, for example and especially, religious texts. The interpretations of texts, that is, the meanings we give to them in terms of beliefs and what we consider important, amount to assertions about those texts. As mentioned in note 4, an assertion, according to Heidegger, is a subspecies of the wider process of interpretation proper, the seeing of something as something, the most "primordial" mode of *hermēneia* (ἐρμηνεία).¹⁶ An assertion is a pointing out of something and a making explicit of that something through a defining act of predication which is then communicated with

¹⁵Robert Eaglestone adopts Heidegger's way of conceiving *aletheia* and art, criticizing what he calls "ethical criticism" of literature. He divides the latter into two camps: "narrative-based neo-Aristotelian" criticism and "deconstructive" criticism, asserting that these approaches assume literature "offers a certain sort of positivist knowledge" (595). Eaglestone is interested more in what he calls a "noninstrumental" theory of truth, an idea of truth he thinks is closer to Heidegger's. Thus armed, Eaglestone concludes that literature or art in general cannot be reduced to "instruments" or "axioms" for use, and art should not be viewed as a "product." Although I appreciate his argument for not reducing art and text to a summation of values, Eaglestone ultimately takes art to be a different way of perceiving the world. In other words, the world stays the same and artworks serve as different perspectives. He also seems to equate world with worldviews, something I think Heidegger would have criticized. See Robert Eaglestone, "One and the Same? Ethics, Aesthetics, and Truth," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 595, 598, 600-601, and 606.

¹⁶BT 200-201.

another.¹⁷ This “letting something be seen” or *apophansis* (ἀπόφανσις) is not, however, worldless but is sustained by “Being-in-the-world” and itself requires understanding and articulation.¹⁸ In short, an assertion is still constituted by the as-structure of interpretation. The act of predication has a further impact. Assertions are that form of discourse that communicates the properties of things to others.¹⁹ As such, they telescope our view down from the “totality of involvements” to what is simply present-at-hand so that, as Heidegger words it, we “just look at it.”²⁰ With regard to texts, to consider assertions about a text, the “judgment” of it so to speak, as exhausting the meaning of the text is nothing more than to allow *apophansis* to masquerade as the primordial *hermēneia*. In other words, even if our assertions about the text are “correct” or inspired, we often forget or ignore that they are built on a prior ground of understanding discourse in general, the existential-hermeneutic. We confuse our particular act of interpretation, where we engage the text as yet another entity sharing our world, with the totality of that world. We assert that the meaning of the text is exhausted in the judgment we give it, for the text and our judgment have come to fill the world. In so doing, we push the text away from us and keep it in the mode of an object, losing the opportunity to listen to the text

¹⁷Ibid., 197.

¹⁸Ibid., 199.

¹⁹Paul Ricoeur offers this interpretation of Heidegger’s thought: there are “aspects of reality which cannot be expressed in terms of the objects referred to in ordinary language.” See Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphoric Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 158. But I think this is a key misunderstanding of Heidegger’s work. It is not that “ordinary language” or objects themselves are some sort of problem, but that to predefine the “real” by limiting Being to an ontology of substances is to limit wonder and to close us off from hearing language and becoming receptive to Being in the first place.

²⁰BT 200-201.

unfold the world and others to us. Furthermore, assertions regarding texts, when those assertions are considered the primary meaning of the text, come to be seen as ontological statements that pertain to the structure of reality, but a reality conceived as an array of entities opposite the human subject, and the more artistry permeates a text, the more it provokes the endeavor to reduce it to whatever assertoric content we can find in it or judgment we make about it.²¹

Returning to an explanation of the concept of world, Heidegger claims that our “Being-with” (*Mitsein*) others is inseparable from our understanding of world.²² This means that we must take the world already to be arrived at both by us and others, not an

²¹Paul Livingston claims that for Heidegger, “machination” leads to a “rule-based metaphysical understanding of the world” (324). He argues that “Heidegger hopes to discover a way of thinking that avoids the Western tradition’s constant basic assumption of self-identity, an assumption which culminates in the modern picture of the autonomous, self-identical subject aggressively set over against a pre-delineated world of objects in a relationship of mutual confrontation” (ibid). I would say that such a technologized condition leads to the prevailing idea that reading can be reduced to a search for values. Livingston continues, arguing that the “dominance of technology and a technological way of thinking” is the result of conceiving the subject as the focus of “lived-experience” or *Erlebnis* (325). Livingston says that Heidegger opposes the concept of “lived-experience” because it demands that the human being be considered a “rational animal,” which in itself means that the “totality of beings” must be “pre-structured” to ensure that said totality able to be “represented” or “experienced” by the subject (331). As objects become the basis of the real, the more “lived experience” stands out as the apparent opposite of objectivity, and this cycle continues until “the universality of the rule, then, licenses the projection of the self-identity of the subject into the assumption of the lawbound unity of the world of objects, guaranteeing the fundamental comprehensibility of all objects by guaranteeing their universal experiencability” (341). My one major criticism of this otherwise perspicuous article is that Livingston seems to have a bit too negative a view of technology. Heidegger never claims that technology or science in itself is an evil or mistaken view. See Paul Livingston, “Thinking and Being: Heidegger and Wittgenstein on Machination and Lived-Experience,” *Inquiry* 46, no. 3 (2003): 324-5, 331-2, 335, and 341.

²²BT 205. In denying that Heidegger was a skeptic, Edward Minar argues that we do not first get “access” to the world and then “figure things out,” but first of all “respond” to “things in themselves.” He continues, saying that skepticism “in positing a setup on which we and the world of things in themselves can be pried apart, expresses a kind of resistance to the openness to things that is a condition of our encountering the world as meaningful” (42). Skepticism is also “a denial of our entitlement to language” and “a sign of a kind of deadening of the world, an unwillingness to allow things to speak to us (responsiveness) as well as a denial of our need to listen (responsibility)” (43-4). From this point of view, the reader who remains a skeptic will never authentically hear the text or recognize their own humanity in their reading. See Edward H. Minar, “Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and Skepticism,” *Harvard Review of Philosophy* 9 (2001): 41-44.

external object next to us, as it were.²³ Although the world already is in one sense being-with-others, Dasein is not free to *not* dis-cover beings—Dasein implies world, implies discovery.²⁴ Only “what, in which direction, how, and how far” we discover is within our “freedom,” and Heidegger explicitly denies that world is a “network of forms which a worldless subject has laid over some kind of material.”²⁵ In denying that Dasein can be worldless, Heidegger makes clear why he thinks certain collective assumptions may lead to both realism and idealism (as well as the extremist position of solipsism) by

²³BT 207; See also Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 110, and "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 23: World is “not a collection of things” known or unknown; neither is it a representation added to everything else; the world is “more fully in being” than what can be perceived or touched, it is not an object, cannot be “looked at”; the world is what allows limits, distance, and nearness.

²⁴BT 417.

²⁵Ibid. The idea that true freedom is not “self-willed” echoes throughout disparate fields of inquiry. In an essay on Coleridge, Jeffrey Barbeau claims that “choosing the Good is not self-determination,” that freedom comes from giving up freedom. See Jeffrey W. Barbeau, "The Development of Coleridge's Notion of Human Freedom: The Translation and Re-Formation of German Idealism in England," *Journal of Religion* 80, no. 4 (2000): 593. Alec Irwin takes a more Sartrean view, claiming that the Other is an “irreducible mystery” and “radically free.” Our freedom to be inhuman, he claims, makes us human. Our freedom means that we are not “static,” and neither is our world, but both are in constant evolution. See Alec Irwin, "Face of Mystery, Mystery of a Face: An Anthropological Trajectory in Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Kaufman's Biohistorical Theology," *The Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 3 (1995): 399-400. James Phillips has this to say regarding Arendt's Heidegger-inspired notion of freedom: “Being-with-others implies freedom because it denotes the constitutive openness of the identity of a being to the essentially volatile field of plurality. Arendtian plurality is the ‘guarantor’ of freedom since it resists the subordination to the One of metaphysics, namely that which all lawfulness presupposes.” See James Phillips, "From Radical to Banal Evil: Hannah Arendt against the Justification of the Unjustifiable," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 12, no. 2 (2004): 144. Louis Roy interprets Schleiermacher this way: “Indeed, without the presence of the other as influencing us or as being influenced by us...neither the feeling of partial dependence nor the feeling of partial freedom would occur.” See Louis Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 104. Casey concludes his work on the imagination with the Sartrean reflection that imagination “liberates” us to be truly free by “maximizing” our possibilities. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 205-207. Finally, Leszek Kołakowski argues that “each time I demand freedom, I reveal the secret of humanity, since I reveal that man *ought* to have freedom” (original italics). Leszek Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 31.

demonstrating that such positions necessarily entail some version of worldlessness. Briefly put, these philosophical approaches posit that existence, i.e., generalized human experience, is best understood by stepping away from such experience and theorizing it as the product of an interaction with some other thing, “material” as Heidegger puts it. In other words, such approaches claim true knowledge of existence is obtained by examining the relationship of one type of existence (that is, the subject who stands outside all relationships in order to judge them correctly) confronting another (the “material” or “world”), positions that amount to an attempt to escape the hermeneutical circle by affirming the existence of timeless objects and making subjects “worldless” by denying to human qualities (emotion, perception, etc.) the power of grasping truth (e.g., forms of realism), or by asserting that world in itself is unverifiable and therefore only the existence of subjects can be affirmed (e.g., forms of idealism, as well as the radical skepticism of solipsism that affirms the existence of only one subject). If we apply, however, Heidegger’s concept of world in general to texts and the world of the text, we see once again that meaning-creation is not the result of holding the text away from oneself as a quasi-object with certain properties, nor is it the agreement between how a reader represents or conceptualizes the text and the “essence” of the text. The reader encounters a text that is part of the world, that is already something for others and is already with others. There can be no possession of the text by a sole subjectivity just as there can be no private possession of meaning or language as demonstrated in Wittgenstein’s oft-touted “private language argument.” We are intimately involved with the text as an item within our care, a care revealed as the desire to “give” the text a

meaning in response to its proffering itself as meaningful, even and especially when such “giving” is above all a matter of “uncovering” a meaning it “already has.” That the text “is” is beyond dispute, but “how far” we have an ontologically appropriate understanding of the text parallels “how far” we have understood the diversity of the modes of Being of beings we encounter within our world. Reading already finds its place in our world and is therefore subject to our perspective, and the worldliness of reading accounts for the “phenomenal” aspect of the text: the text seems to present that “aspect” to the reader which coincides with that reader’s understanding of beings, whether or not the reader has authentically read the text. The power of the literary work of art is precisely that, in our reading of it, its interpretation is articulated with how we understand not only one thing or range of things within the world, but also, and far more radically, with how we understand the “totality of significance” that is the world, which as that totality provides the context of all contexts wherein we encounter whatever we do encounter within that world, including the text itself.²⁶ In other words, one’s first approach to the text is through how one already understands beings in the world and the world itself, but reading the text grants us the possibility of reenvisioning the world and therefore re-interpreting

²⁶Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” 121: the world is something “relational.” Dasein is “*in the midst* of beings, comporting itself *toward* beings” original italics. Even if we do not form a concept of this wholeness, “the expanse of this whole is changeable” and we still “understand” it, and this is a “surpassing in the direction of the world,” that is, transcendence. Heidegger calls transcendence “being-in-the-world” (109), but makes clear that to transcend in this way is not to transcend an object or being which the world is not toward some other being, called the “world.” The world is “that from out of which Dasein *gives itself the signification* of whatever beings it *is able* to comport itself toward in whatever way” original italics. Here we see a connection between potentiality and interpretation, the world becoming “the originary projection of the possibilities of Dasein, insofar as...it is able to comport itself toward such beings” (123). Projection is inseparable from being-in-the-world. In an essay on Paracelsus, Jung gives us a different but related notion of projection: “the object ‘throws’ [*zuwerffen*] its meaning at man.” See C. G. Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, ed. William McGuire, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 27.

the text and creating new meanings, a constant renewal of self and the possibilities of being.

The totalizing framework of interpretation does not determine *that* one encounters a world, but the *how* of it. Nor does it close off avenues of change or creativity within the framework. Building on Heidegger's understanding of world, we can come to envision language (and text) as tied to the human person not as a tool, a piece of equipment, or simply a thing amongst other things in the world, but, perhaps unexpectedly, as something that exceeds our control and disobeys our desires.²⁷ Meaning-creation becomes more than—because, indeed, radically different from—simply the wish fulfillment of a single entity engaging a world thought to be entirely within its power and responsive to its will. In this way, Heidegger, like Wittgenstein, is opposed to the idea that meanings simply await attachment at our discretion to things, as well as being opposed to the notion that interpreting a text, for example, amounts to finding the “correct” meaning for something among a host of “incorrect” or “false” meanings. Wittgenstein's language games or Heidegger's explanation of the structure of interpretation are ways of understanding the truthfulness within language, that *is* language, but without resorting to a fundamental reality defined as a collection of objects and subjects, or to a conception of truth that equates truth with the correct correspondence between word and thing, a correspondence both thinkers deny is the source of meaning, if such correspondence can

²⁷This idea of language is radically opposed, then, to Owen Barfield's, who claims that language and meaning are an “unconscious” form of evolution, and that we think “via” words, as if words were vehicles. See Owen Barfield, *History in English Words*, rev. ed. (Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Books, 2002), 166 and 189.

rightfully be said to exist. It becomes clear that a different notion of truth becomes necessary, to which the next section is devoted.

Part II. Heidegger and the Truth of Language

It therefore might be helpful to us to rid ourselves of the habit of always hearing only what we already understand.

Heidegger

On pages 190 and 191 of *BT*, Heidegger explains the limiting power of interpretation, both in terms of how it limits subjectivity, as that term is normally understood (which is not the way Heidegger claims the ancient Greeks would have understood it), and in terms of how it limits conceptualization. He says there: “In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation.” In other words, the world is not laid out before us as a totality that we can examine from every angle, from a God-perspective, so to speak, and to which we attach a meaning, as if it were some “naked thing” that demands a value be placed upon it (and it is important to notice here how this misconception of world and meaning directly correlates with establishing a worldview and a system of coherent and self-reinforcing beliefs). We already have an understanding of being-in-the-world, we are already in a mode of dis-covering things or beings with which we will be concerned in some way in our everyday lives, concern that ranges from thinking something merely utilizable to thinking it a source of wonder. Heidegger focuses on texts as an example, claiming that

there is never a “presuppositionless” approach to what is in a text, but that the text is already filled with the assumptions of the interpreter.²⁸ For those already familiar with contemporary approaches to literary theory, this seems nothing more than the often-heard “hermeneutical circle,” but what is important to notice here is that Heidegger is making an ontological claim, not simply presenting a method by which to approach literary texts. Heidegger asks us to question on what ground we even assume that we *can* presuppose, what is on the other side of those presuppositions, as it were. In that questioning lies the dis-discovery of truth and how language brings that truth to light.

To uncover that truth, however, is to question the usual assumptions of what truth already is, and how language can be truthful.²⁹ Heidegger explains these assumptions and

²⁸BT 192.

²⁹And this questioning has both supporters and detractors. Hans-Johann Glock tries to map a middle ground between analytic and non-analytic theories of truth by claiming that truth “depends on the mental and linguistic activities of people” (86). He argues that to talk about truth is to talk about human thought, which is to talk about language and concepts; however, he makes sure his readers understand that people do not decide whether things exist or not. He denies that “truth-bearers” are “mentalist” or “nominalist” (they are not sentences or “mental processes”), nor are they “self-subsistent abstract entities” like Plato’s Forms (88). His real aim is to show that truth being associated with language does not make one a relativist, coherentist, or pragmatist. But language is still the “medium” of truth, for although truths exist, the concept of truth depends on “having a language.” Although Glock’s attempt is admirable, he cannot seem to break away from the ultimate metaphysical notion that truth is correctness and that language corresponds to things. See Hans-Johann Glock, “Truth without People?” *Philosophy* 72, no. 279 (1997): 86, 88-9, 92, 101, and 103-4. Thomas Carlson remains closer to Heidegger’s criticism of the present idea of truth in that truth now exists only “in terms of the self-certainty of the representing subject” whose task is to “demystify” the world in order to “comprehend” all (209-210). Alluding to Heidegger’s essay on technology, he claims that in calculation something always “escapes” the power of representation, and that this may be a path back to “mystery.” See Thomas A. Carlson, “Locating the Mystical Subject,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 209-10, 225-6. Nathan Scott Jr. interprets Heidegger as saying that “we in the modern West are a people so committed to the superstitions of positivism and to ‘the humanization of truth’ that we have virtually lost any capacity for performing an act of true attention before the sheer ontological weight and depth of the world” (151). He argues that Heidegger wants us to see that “the locus of truth...is not in this or that perspective (or category, or proposition, or system) that may be imposed upon reality, but is rather the ‘unhiddenness’ or transparency of Being: which is to say that truth is not an achievement but a gift, something granted and received” (152). He concludes that in Heidegger is a “deep piety,” an “immense sensitivity of ecological conscience” where all is “instinct with holiness” (167-8). I would contend that reading can be this activity

their rise in the history of thought in various ways throughout his corpus, but the essential story remains the same. For Heidegger, the most serious, yet unavoidable, error in thinking is to conceive of Being as a being.³⁰ Although he believes it is possible to recognize this error and “recover” Being, as it were, one can persist in this error, and if this crucial misstep is taken, other ideas logically follow: Being becomes a substance, usually the “highest” or most “essential” of substances, and what is real becomes

that receives the text as a gift and through the reading of it awakens to this “holiness.” See Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *The Poetics of Belief: Studies in Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, Santayana, Stevens, and Heidegger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 151-2, 167-8. Such a view of truth is of course the target of much aggression, for truth in the Western tradition is characterized primarily as a desire for correctness. In *Cratylus*, Socrates declares that “speech signifies all things and keeps them circulating and always going about, and that it has two forms—true and false” (408c). He goes on to compound this with a correspondence/reference theory, that names should “imitate” the “essence” the thing “in itself.” See Plato, *Cratylus*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 408c and 423a-e. Aristotle takes up this idea of correspondence, declaring that the verb “to be” and its participles “do not themselves indicate anything,” though for him this is not something to wonder at. See Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 16b20-25. This tradition continues, with Hilary Putnam for example claiming that words that refer to “real” objects do not change their meaning, but that we simply have “false beliefs” about those objects so use the words “mistakenly,” as it were. See Hilary Putnam, “The Analytic and the Synthetic,” in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 50. In a later essay, he conforms completely to the idea that truth is correctness, asserting that only “experts” know the “real” meaning of “natural kind” terms, like water or gold (water’s real meaning being, e.g., two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen). Context does not seem to matter, and objects trump language when it comes to meaning. See Hilary Putnam, “Meaning and Reference,” in *Contemporary Analytic Philosophy*, ed. James Baillie (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2003), 424 and 426. Jaakko Hintikka targets Heidegger directly, claiming that his hermeneutical approach to language means that he is committed to a “universal” language and the “ineffability” of semantics. He instead claims that “any special hermeneutical mode of thinking and argumentation” can be avoided and the truth defined. He agrees with Carnap that science and philosophy should be in step with one another, and argues that hermeneutics “side-steps the rational discourse” of lawyers and scientists. See Jaakko Hintikka, *Lingua Universalis Vs. Calculus Ratiocinator: An Ultimate Presupposition of Twentieth-Century Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997), xv and xvii. From a Wittgensteinian point of view, William Child believes that Platonism makes impossible the difference between the “correct” and “incorrect” application of concepts because it falls back on a “mind-independent” reality. See William Child, “Pears’s Wittgenstein: Rule-Following, Platonism, and Naturalism,” in *Wittgensteinian Themes: Essays in Honour of David Pears*, ed. David Charles and William Child (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 87.

³⁰See, e.g., *BT* 26: “The Being of entities ‘is’ not itself an entity.” As Heidegger explains throughout this section, to think otherwise is to ignore the question of Being by assuming it has already been answered, or is not worthy of being answered. But entities are understood through Being and so Being must be brought to light, otherwise entities are “defined” as originating in other entities, until Being itself is considered an entity and not understood on its own.

understood only as what is in one sense or another “substantial.”³¹ There is a further effect of such thinking: to know something now means to look at these substances as they “are,” so truth can now be defined as the “correct assertions” about these substances.³² It is important to recognize here that Heidegger is not simply criticizing “materialism,” but any kind of ontologically uncritical reliance on the notion of Being as equivalent to substance, including the “spiritual” substances of the medieval era, or even more modern “substances,” like the psyche or “unconscious,” a kind of power or nature (what could be termed a “physis” [φύσις]) with certain properties. It is also important to see that Heidegger would not simply say that such philosophies or sciences are false or wrong, but that they themselves are interpretative frameworks whereby the question of Being is already assumed to be answered, and therefore need not be explicitly raised or explored (see note 30).

Still early on in *BT*, as briefly described in the first section of this chapter, Heidegger also denies the assumption, itself based on the ontology of substances, that truth (“real” knowledge) is a type of agreement between language about objects and the objects themselves, something psychic and something extra-psychic, whether physical in the more usual, limited sense, or not; nor does he think truth is an agreement of representations located somewhere in consciousness, some form of idealism Berkeleyian or Kantian in nature, that either assumes there are no “substantial” or “material” objects at all, or that perhaps there are such things, but we cannot know them as they really are “in

³¹*BT* 245.

³²*Ibid.*, 246; further expansion of this at 257.

themselves.”³³ Heidegger rightly characterizes the position that language should “agree” with its references as realist (knowing corresponds to objects however conceived) and the Kantian position as idealist (knowing is a coherence of representations). Yet for Heidegger Dasein is where truth “happens,” and that happening discloses itself as language, a concept of truth that reveals the shortcomings of both a correspondence theory of meaning and its associated idea of truth (realist, a relation between the internal and external) and a coherence theory of meaning and the notion of truth it supports (the hanging together of concepts/representations often secured by group convention). As explained previously, such positions effectively dehumanize experience by leaving unquestioned our primary understanding of things as “there” to be used for our own ends, i.e., that a schism exists between I as a subject and the objects that “make up” the world. Although one might assume that the invention of the subject is the ultimate “humanization,” Heidegger argues, and I agree, that it makes impossible understanding our humanity as being-with-others, that is, as in a world already, and so makes interpreting the text into a problem in that the text is now seen as just another object whose worth and use is suspect, i.e., it may tell us nothing “truthful” or correct, nothing worth calling knowledge, according to the standards appropriate to the subject-object distinction (timeless, constant, a-contextual truth, e.g., logic, axioms, prophecies, laws, gnosis, as opposed to the text’s potential for giving readers knowledge of a culture or understanding of emotional experience, “knowledge” which still falls below the standard of truth set by this type of theorist). On the contrary, our humanity, our thinking, is

³³Ibid., 261.

caught up in the world that is already part of us and we part of it, and we become blind to this fact by asserting or assuming subject-hood and the concomitant objectification of the world.

By following Heidegger, however, we can understand truth to be an “autonomous” activity that “opens” a region and allows entities to come to light, what he variously terms disclosure, dis-covering, revealing, taking out of hiding, “Being-uncovering,” all of which are afforded to only one kind of being, that is, the human being or Dasein.³⁴ From this perspective, we are always “in the truth,” but this dislocation from the concept of correctness or agreement is also why we can be wrong, i.e., being correct or incorrect about something, “erring,” is possible because Dasein is always “truth-ing” in this way.³⁵ Therefore, with respect to the practice of reading, always being dis-covering does not equate to being “right” in whatever we claim a text means, as if such ontological status insulated us from having to read authentically or consider other possibilities of Being, or as if we were simply talking to ourselves like Wittgenstein’s solipsist tries, and fails, to do.

Exploring further Heidegger’s notion of truth as disclosure and the implications of such thinking, although Dasein discloses in and through discourse, such discourse has what he calls an “ontic” aspect in that we first encounter it in an everyday way as something to be investigated, taken up or put down, used and thrown away, obeyed or

³⁴Ibid., 263.

³⁵Ibid.

ignored.³⁶ But Heidegger in his later essays urges us to understand that although we may “possess” speech, language as such belongs to Being. We are told that “language is the house of being,” to use Heidegger’s famous formulation from the “Letter on Humanism” of 1946, and that in the most important, primordial sense “language speaks,” not us.³⁷ Heidegger is able to make this claim because he links disclosure, for him the essence of truth, with language, that it is only in language that Being is revealed, that beings “show” themselves. In the essay “The Nature of Language,” Heidegger puts forward this description of words: it is not that a self-formed object, the word, gets attached to another object, but the word “itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it ‘is’ a thing.”³⁸ Here we see that given Heidegger’s general principle that we do not decide *that* beings are disclosed, but only *how* beings are disclosed, and even that only within certain variable limits, then language too cannot be within our possession but is “granted” or “lent” to us so that disclosure may occur. The text, then, is also a disclosing of beings, a place of truth, not simply a person’s (the

³⁶Ibid., 266.

³⁷Martin Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 239. But it should be made clear that language is not identical to discourse or human speech. See Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 248-49 and Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 56: “For the phenomenon most worthy of thought and questioning remains the mystery of language—wherein our entire reflection has to gather itself—above all when it dawns on us that language is not a work of human beings: language speaks. Humans speak only insofar as they co-respond to language.” See also Martin Heidegger, “Why Poets?” in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 232 on language as the house; Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968), 128 and Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, ed. John Sallis, trans. Reginald Lilly, *Studies in Continental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 96 on how language exceeds expression and is already speaking. And again at Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 112 and 124.

³⁸Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 66.

author's) interpretation of (our) world, but a "happening" or "event-ing" of (our) world that demands our attention, our own responsive interpretation. To put it another way, Heidegger is trying to illustrate what could be called, in perhaps Zen-like language, a harmonious monism, a unity in which human beings are not mere monads inhabiting a greater whole, perceiving other entities and attempting to describe them through a useful and incidental tool called "language." By having language "speak" and by jettisoning the Cartesian ego, Heidegger is able to concentrate on the human being's relationships with all other beings, not her questionable mastery of them, relationships that are founded in language itself, regardless of what we actually choose, forget, or refuse to say.

The idea that the human being is the locus of truth in that the human being is "where" disclosure happens (but is only that disclosure by "listening" and "responding" to language that is "already there"), directly challenges certain views of literary works of art. On the one hand, it allows texts to awaken truths that go deeper than judgments or assertions about the world or themselves, no matter how "accurate." For Heidegger, furthermore, the quintessential work of art, the essence of which is to be a profound and founding taking-place (what he terms "setting-into-work") of truth as disclosure, was "poetry"³⁹ in a broad sense, based on the original meaning of the Greek origin of that term

³⁹Jose Benardete claims that "one extra-scientific mode of discourse that accommodates opaque contexts is supplied by poetry itself" (185). Although this could sound like praise, it eviscerates the literary work of art by implying that poetic language holds second place to what he seems to consider more important and primary, i.e., descriptive use of language. When describing properties fails us, it seems, poetry is sanctioned. Benardete seems to conclude as much, claiming that Wallace Stevens' work has more in common with Frege and Quine, that "they have in the end more to offer the study of poetry than the latter [Heidegger and Derrida]" (194). It is this kind of reading that I find to be nothing more than an obsession with values and correctness, not an authentic hearing of language. See Jose A. Benardete, "One Word of the Sea: Metaphysics in Wallace Stevens," *The Wallace Stevens Journal* 20, no. 2 (1996): 185 and 194.

(ποιεῖν: to make, build, invent). Here we rise above any quibbling over the relative merits of “fiction” or “non-fiction,” realizing that such a distinction itself relies on a theory of the real that already depends on an ontology of substances able to be used or grasped in some way. On the other hand, how we conceive the discovery of meaning through reading texts is also greatly altered. Accepting Heidegger’s explanation of the truth of language, there can be no “real” text lurking behind a multiplicity of interpretations, a text-object the meaning of which is ontologically excluded from us, as if obedient to Kant’s claim that we cannot reach the thing in itself. As discourse originating in what Heidegger here names language, the text calls to us constantly, beckons us in a variety of voices into what has been disclosed. In this way, the text is always true if one reads it authentically.⁴⁰ But just how we as individual readers create a meaning via interpretation for this text depends on how we listen, such that how we encounter this text is constituted in our response to the text. And this response engages us not with a host of meanings waiting to be attached to words, nor words to things, but with no thing at all, that which cannot be named.⁴¹ Just as Being is not itself a being but allows us to inquire into beings, the unnameable in language is that inexpressible which grounds any meaning which we build for the text—it is that which must be “put into words” but never exhausted in thinking, never finally named and categorized, and therefore always open to further interpretation. At times, our response may be nothing more than the imputation of our

⁴⁰Explaining this synonymy between “true” and “authentic” is part of the project of this chapter and the next. Authentic reading is a hearing of what the text has to say, what it reveals in its saying, and this Heideggerian notion of truth transcends any idea of correctness, whether in terms of right/wrong, good/evil.

⁴¹Heidegger, “Letter on ‘Humanism,’” 243: “But if the human being is to find his way once again into the nearness of being he must first learn to exist in the nameless.”

beliefs to the text, but in such cases all that has been accomplished is a turning away from a clear listening, a burying of ourselves in the ego-subject—this too “counts” as a way to engage the text, to interpret it. To put it another way, the notion of “misinterpreting” the text, if that is to describe somehow missing a fixed meaning within or represented by the text, is not a possibility, though the possibility of “misinterpretation” does remain in that we can turn a deaf ear to language and another’s discourse, believing all interpretations can be and should be ideally reducible to one or that our wilful interpretations exhaust the meaning of the text.

As sketched at the beginning of this chapter, since meaning-creation is in one very important sense the dynamism of being-there (*Dasein*), the claim that words, sentences, or texts should ideally be logically reducible to one meaning or set of meanings is nonsensical. Thinking language is reducible in this way attempts to “freeze” the interpretative activity of *Dasein* as well as implies that world and language are somehow separated, forcing *Dasein* to be mediator between them. But Heidegger’s understanding of personhood combined with the evident flexibility of meanings that Wittgenstein demonstrates belies any notion of the necessity of fixed meanings. From another perspective, collapsing all possible meanings to one or a set is akin to *Dasein* reducing Being to the status of entity, and thereby coming to erroneously believe that the Being of beings is an ultimate being, God, the One, etc. This ontotheological tendency in *Dasein* is transferred to language when we think a text should only have one “best” interpretation, that words correspond to things, or that meanings arise through some logical calculus. Heidegger at *BT* 193 claims that “meaning is the ‘upon-which’ of a projection in terms of

which something becomes intelligible as something.” As a further expansion of this “definition,” he later says that “meaning is...not a property attaching to entities, lying ‘behind’ them, or floating somewhere as an ‘intermediate domain.’” Since the projection of meaning is what allows beings to become intelligible, Heidegger notes that strictly speaking only Dasein “‘has’ meaning...[h]ence only Dasein can be meaningful [*sinnvoll*] or meaningless [*sinnlos*].” Like Wittgenstein, Heidegger is pointing out through such expressions the human origin and human character of “finding” meaning, that things or entities in the world do not carry about themselves an orbiting self-interpretation of their own supposed meaning. Interpreting a text therefore is not the result of thorough research on a finite number of meanings concluding with the discovery of the most neatly fitting, most nearly perfectly “correct” interpretation. Texts do not “have” meanings in this sense. Nor does discourse. The human being (Dasein) is that which alone “possesses” meaning, is “full of” meaning, “grants” meaning, is “at a loss for” meaning, or is even “without meaning” (“meaning-less”).

Given what Heidegger says above, interpreting a text, whether or not such interpretation is an understanding one or an inauthentic reading whereby we value (or devalue) the text because of its putative “meaning” (or lack thereof) for us, is the result of an imaginative engagement or encounter with the language of another human being. I use “imaginative” here as synonymous with “creative,” hearing in it the activity of poiesis. It is a constructive process that requires envisioning something that is more than the sum of its parts; not, however, a putative unity or world-order (as would be the goal of an inauthentic reading), but something we regard as beautiful and puts us on a height as it

were, from where we can best articulate our understanding of something. This form of imagination has no connection with a “correct” sighting of something in the hopes of seeing it “truly,” but is equivalent to an authentic hearing of texts, allowing us to “see” into and by way of the text. To embrace fully such imaginative engagement is to understand that our own meaning-creations can be restructured indefinitely. Just as we construct our world through an interpretation of the entities in the world, so we construct beliefs about the text and “from” the text. But the text as ground of our own poetic activity does not mean the text is an ideal model to which we look in order to make a copy. Building meaning from the text is an organic process, a joining that makes it impossible to tell where reader ends and author begins—such is the power of discourse, of sharing. Hearing the “from” in this way precludes us from considering the text to be the “cause” of certain thoughts or beliefs. For one’s own discourse (thoughts) is certainly much more than the determined outcome of certain stimuli. To mechanize (or “technologize”) the language/thought process in terms of stimuli and stimulus-response, to turn it into a mental process, is something to which both Wittgenstein and Heidegger are ardently opposed. From this perspective, the beliefs we so often wish to attribute to a text should be considered to be in symbiosis with that text, not caused by it as if an inevitable conclusion to the reading process. The deep “problems” of interpretation, which certainly exist, are not the result of mis-steps along a mechanical process that can be resolved through, e.g., applied logic, but are bound to how humans are engaged within the world.

Part III. The Literary Work of Art and the Making of the Reader⁴²

One can call something to the attention of others, and compel them to engage in reflection, only by traveling a stretch of the way oneself.

Heidegger

The claim that the text “has” no meaning in that the text cannot be said to have only one unique signification that proves to be the “correct” one, the secret key to how it should be read, requires further clarification. The text is not a tool or analogous to a piece of machinery in that when we try to predict correctly the working of a machine, we know our prediction is wrong if the machine then functions in such a way as to invalidate the prediction. For texts, we only ask readers to give us a line of reasoning (something like Wittgenstein’s “chain of reasons”) in order to understand how they arrived at their particular perspective. The text of course is not a machine, but as disclosing discourse, already has a human quality. Furthermore, as discussed above, the text is not somehow an object existing alongside the author, so much as it is the author’s own expression of herself as the “there” of Being: the text as art-work, then, is the Da-sein of the author, or, perhaps more to the point, is the author as that author distills herself as it were through her own imaginative (poetic) activity into the work itself as “worked,” where Being discloses itself as that clearing of the “there” that is the work. In this sense, then, the text does “have” meaning in that it is meaning-ful, not as if it were the definition of a word or a summary description of some other thing.

But I am not claiming here that the meaning of the text must now be equivalent to what the author intends in the sense that the author may have a “message” she wants to

⁴²For this section, I will be relying heavily on Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art.”

convey via the text. Such a message, if it exists at all, is certainly part of what a text “means,” in the broadest sense of that term, but so is how we further interpret that message itself, the possibilities thinking about such a message might awaken.

Considering the text unable to mean anything other than what the author intends would entail thinking that the author is fully in control of language, i.e., thinking the author to be the sole source of meaning and the “One” who decides the meanings of all entities. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, this is akin to assuming motives to be causes to which both readers and authors have access, as discussed in chapter 2. For example, we assume that the author was motivated to write the text, that she intends something by it, and that these intentions and motivations somehow add up to an external cause of the work being written. If we could access this cause, so such thinking would conclude, we would have the secret code by which the meaning of the work becomes clear. But as concluded in the previous chapter, motives and intentions are not causes, but a certain type of reason unique to an agent. In other words, even if readers or the author do in fact determine the author’s intentions and motivations, doing so does not amount to identifying the text’s unique “cause,” even though such readers assume it does. They think intention is cause, and in turn that cause is the origin that in itself is the secret key to meaning. But there is no secret key to be found. The intentions of the author (either in the sense of what she herself wants her audience to think or feel, or in the sense of her own personal reasons for writing), even if we were to know them, would give us no reprieve from the responsibility of forming our own meaning for the text, that understanding we have of it, with its

accompanying interpretation that results in beliefs or actions.⁴³ What the author understands her “own” text to mean takes no priority over others’ understanding of its meaning, and indeed ultimately has no or little impact on what beliefs readers form about or “from” the reading of the text.

We should return for a moment to the idea of world and how world already encompasses readers, texts, and authors. Heidegger gives us a clue to the connection between world and language at *BT* 199: “Language ‘hides’ in itself a developed way of conceiving.” This is of course an earlier declaration of his about language, conceived here perhaps as equivalent to human speech, an idea he later denies, but the important point to consider is that discourse gives us a common ground, a common structure within which and upon which we may speak—in short, a grammar. What is hinted at here is that we are always already Being-with others (*Mitsein*), even if consciousness of this withness does not come to us till later, till reflection on how it “hides,” if it comes to us at all. We are already in the picture, as it were, already within the structure of language, the “house of Being,” when we have any desire to speak or to respond to speech, to write or read a text. Language therefore always implies “entities,” other consciousnesses.⁴⁴ It is not that we must think, then translate these thoughts into words. Our thinking is our discourse, our words are our deeds, as Wittgenstein would say. In Heidegger’s terms, we

⁴³Regina Schwartz echoes my own sense of the call of the text and the responsibility of the reader in that the call “evokes not manipulation but wonder...and responsibility.” See Regina M. Schwartz, “From Ritual to Poetry: Herbert’s Mystical Eucharist,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 139. But reading must be authentic if wonder is to be its result.

⁴⁴*BT* 201.

already understand that we are with others; our “self-expression” that is Dasein takes place in and as a discourse with others, and so our response to the text can never be the only truth, is never the product of a purely self-enclosed entity expressing and asserting a meaning “onto” or “into” a text.

With these reflections on language (texts) and world, Heidegger can claim that the present understanding of truth, and therefore our primary engagement with texts and how we understand them to be truthful, is defined largely by the correctness of assertions, also known as judgments or propositions.⁴⁵ As such, truth finds its home largely in the reification of the surrounding world and in scientific (or perhaps “scientistic”) statements about that world, the correct relation between “subjects” (namely, human beings) and “objects” (everything else). It should be made clear, however, that Heidegger does not dispute or declare “incorrect” this notion of truth; he certainly sees the usefulness in the scientific understanding of the world. His argument regards the “essence” or “ground” that allows even this kind of truth to exist, the very thing that allows us to think and assert the properties of objects in the first place. According to Heidegger, entities in the world must first be “allowed” to be before any assignation of properties can begin, and this refers us to the notion of care as well as to the necessity of freedom.⁴⁶ Heidegger rethinks the concept of freedom by questioning the subject-object distinction, denying that freedom is subject-centered and refers to what the subject can or cannot do. Instead, freedom is that ontological structure, not a power or property of human beings, that

⁴⁵Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," 138-9.

⁴⁶Ibid., 142-145.

allows entities to be, i.e., freedom is on the side of entities, of others.⁴⁷ Regarding care, as those beings the Being of which is “care,” humans are in the unique position of revealing (and also concealing) entities, namely through the process of discourse, the expression (etymologically, a speaking out) in language of their Being-in-the-world in a mode of understanding, which, with regard to reading and writing, is the imaginative creation that is the literary work of art wherein truth as disclosure (the dis-covery of beings) happens. Heidegger follows along this path of thinking, arguing that only if such “primordial” disclosure of beings occurs, can the beings [*Seienden*] so disclosed now become the “locus” of something called “properties” predicated of some “substance” that is the subject of the predication.⁴⁸ It is not the assertion of properties of such substances but this revelation through humans and human language that is properly the essence of truth.⁴⁹ Heidegger concludes that truth is a “trait” of beings themselves and is not located in human behavior toward beings, in the sense that truth is not in our grasp as something we measure and measure with, though the current conception of truth is exactly that, namely that truth has something to do with “correct sight” that itself leads to correct assertion, not

⁴⁷Ibid., 143-144.

⁴⁸J. Robert Barth cites George Steiner’s description of our modern obsession with the correct assignation of properties, an activity that I claim is not the “essence” of language: it is “the prevalence of grammatological, editorial, didactic, glossarial and judiciary techniques and ideals over any actual poetic-aesthetic creativity.” See J. Robert Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 132. I am arguing that reading is ontologically (and knowingly can be) this latter activity.

⁴⁹Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” 151 and 153.

with revelation or unhiddenness.⁵⁰ The authentic practice of reading, then, is in being receptive to the truth (disclosure) that is the text, in letting the text be, a receptivity that calls for our own imaginative expression of understanding, i.e., the making of meaning.

Not only does Heidegger show that the truth of judgments or assertions is dependent on the truth of dis-covey, but he also demonstrates that truth is not something that a human being can “own” in the form of a whim or desire, as the solipsist, for example, must believe she does, for that we dis-cover is not something up to us. Our wishes and wants are themselves, in this egocentric fashion, a specialized form of assertion or judgment, which is why forcing a text into a certain, pre-ordained interpretative framework is an “inauthentic” reading and can be termed a “misreading” of the text—it is equivalent in this sense to, and just as nonsensical as, Wittgenstein’s solipsist desiring an absolutely private language with private meanings.⁵¹ In misreading,

⁵⁰Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," 177: "As unhiddenness, truth is still a fundamental trait of beings themselves. But as the correctness of the 'gaze,' it becomes a characteristic of human comportment toward beings."

⁵¹BT 191; on translation as interpretation or degenerating into a forced interpretation, see Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle's *Physics* B, I," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 188 and Martin Heidegger, "Anaximander's Saying," in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 247 and 280; on the multiplicity of meanings being the true structure of thought and not a fault brought about by not reaching the goal of “real” meaning, see Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, 71 and 177: the seeming “confrontation” between opposed interpretations “is in reality a mutual reflection on the guiding presuppositions.” Our understanding, our thinking, of what the discourse is about grows as we enter into various interpretations. And a little later: “But it would violate the meaning of interpretation generally if we cherished the view that there can be an interpretation which is non-relative, that is, absolutely valid. Absolutely valid can at the very most be only the sphere of ideas within which we beforehand place the text to be interpreted. And the validity of the presupposed sphere of ideas can be absolute only if the absoluteness rests on something unconditional—on a faith.” Here we are thrown back to the difference between theology and philosophy and that to assume that there can be only one “absolutely valid” interpretation is to not question a certain ontology or doctrine of truth (the “sphere of ideas”) that “fixes” the meaning of the text. It is a response to the text, but ultimately not an authentic hearing of the call of the text. However, being an authentic reader does not automatically exclude one from a “faith.”

we transfer the locus of truth from the text itself into our judgments about the text and the world in which the text finds itself. To allow the text to be is to hear the text, which is not identical to arriving at “the” meaning of the text, but to be turned toward the text itself, as we are turned toward an entity when we allow such an entity to be. In this turning toward, in this response-ability, we cannot help but speak the truth (or perhaps read the truth) that the entity already “has,” i.e., to disclose the entity as entity, though this speaking is itself discourse that will be interpreted in turn as a “text” on its own. But such revealing that discourse is, is not a simple process that falls neatly into categories of right and wrong, good or bad. Authentic interpretation even more so resists simple ethical, moral, and generically evaluative categorization, for it is an active and dynamic being-with-others that belies holistic worldviews and calculative ratiocination. The “bad” interpretation, on my reading, is in effect a misinterpretation, the *not* letting be of the texts or entities and such negation’s concomitant turning away from beings by fixing them along a range of values or within the acceptable limits of particular beliefs. In discourse as Heidegger imagines it, language is always about the entity in question, even if the particular words are a lie or mistaken. Similarly, the meaning we give the text, even if inauthentic and therefore in error, likewise cannot help but be “about” the text itself, and as such is not merely equivalent to a wish or desire for the text to say whatever we want it to say. Such “excess” of meaning always offers hope of a better reading.

The conclusion arrived at in *BT* regarding truth is equivalent to that of “The Essence of Truth,” although expressed differently in the latter. In the former, Being-uncovering, which is the human being, is the “primary truth,” whereas Being-uncovered

is a “secondary” truth, and in this case refers to entities.⁵² As such, humans are “*in the truth*” (original italics), that is, it is part of who we are (it is an ontological or existential structure) to disclose entities through language.⁵³ We cannot help but disclose, and therefore, just as in the conclusion to “The Essence of Truth,” we do not own the truth, nor proclaim it, nor know it as if it were from “within” and accessible primarily by ourselves alone. On the contrary, language, which includes the assertion or proposition, is more akin to showing the “how” of the uncoveredness of beings, and once uttered (or written), becomes available to everyone while still retaining its “about-which” of the beings in question.⁵⁴ In the terms of this dissertation, this is similar to the claim that all thematic readings of a text “refer” to what the text is about and cannot help but refer to what is in question, for the text has already disclosed its “about-which” and our response to this disclosure will stay faithful to that act of referring given the structure of language. An inauthentic reading, then, is not inauthentic because it somehow fails to refer to the text or makes an incorrect interpretation. Likewise, we can see that authentic reading has nothing to do with “subjectivity” and its desire for simple wish-fulfillment, and that the sensitivity to multiple, creative interpretations of a text has nothing to do with solipsism, i.e., the reduction of truth to the experience of one subject.

Armed with this new understanding of language and truth, we can now explore with Heidegger the power of the literary work of art in provoking our response as readers.

⁵²BT 263.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., 266.

In particular, we will see that religious texts are literary works of art precisely because they provoke us to respond to a “happening” of truth as disclosure as discussed above, not because they demand our obedience to or adoption of certain propositions via the assertion of certain values and beliefs. In addition, understanding and interpreting religious texts, and literary art in general, is not dependent on any systematic, theoretical investigation of them or on a clear division of what is “literally” true versus what is “metaphorical” in hopes of reaching what is “real” in the text. As we will see, such thinking about texts and their own poetic process is the thinking of metaphysics, of assuming clearly bounded realms of beings and Being. Meaning-creation as a response to the text is a response to a deeper call to that abyss of meaninglessness that is ineffability (briefly described in the introduction), a response that calls the reader into question and deconstructs both conceiving the reader as an ego-subject confronted with an object that is the text and conceiving both reader and text as a confluence of signs or representations.

Although this process itself must await full description in the next chapter, briefly stated, the creation of meaning is itself the activity of reading. This poiesis of meaning can be inauthentic, described at various points in this and the last chapter, or authentic, which is a sensitivity to the literary work of art as art, as bringing forth the Dasein of the author and the Dasein of the reader and calling that reader to think about Being (the inexpressible, language conceived as the “house of Being,” not just that which is spoken). In reflecting on our own Being-there (*Da-sein*, or, to fit the English order, *Sein-da*, Being as revealed/disclosed in being human), we as readers grasp the opportunity to come to an authentic sense of self, a self seen as becoming, as dynamic, as created through our

interaction with another by way of the text. One can think of authentic/inauthentic interpretations as a further development (a deeper understanding) of our ontological status as creators of meaning, we who are either meaning-ful or meaning-less. Considering texts and readers to be only subject/objects or conglomerations of signs/representations misses our uniqueness as Dasein, as revelatory, and implies that something divides language from world, from Dasein, and therefore some third element is needed to explain language and texts—a third element that itself will be unable, as Wittgenstein demonstrates, to account for the flexibility of language, as well as unable, as Heidegger shows us, to account for why beings “be” at all, i.e., the question of Being is ignored or assumed to be answered by the inclusion of a third element.

Part IV: The Literary Work of Art and (Re)Inventing the Self

Reflection is the courage to put up for question the truth of one’s own presuppositions and the space of one’s own goals.

Heidegger

Briefly summarizing Heidegger’s concept of artistic creation, the work of art as the self-presencing of the truth of beings is the dis-covering of those beings and the bringing them out of hiding (ἀλήθεια) such that they now confront us with the wonder that they are at all. This wonder is part of and provokes a response from those addressed by the work (whom Heidegger calls the “preservers”), and opens the way for those preservers to think about Being in general. To see why Heidegger uses the term “preservers,” we need to understand that a primary theme of “The Origin of the Work of Art” is that the work of art transports us.⁵⁵ This form of travel occurs as truth, but not

⁵⁵“In proximity to the work we were suddenly somewhere other than we are usually accustomed to be,” 15.

truth in the sense of representation, one object (the artwork) mimicking another (what is portrayed), but truth that shows us the how of a being, in short, the truth of disclosure.⁵⁶ Although the work of art is language understood as the “expressing” of beings as beings, this disclosure is in need of Dasein. As explained above, human speech is the “echo” or response to language as Heidegger understands it, so in the realm of artwork, the response will be as a “preserver.”⁵⁷ For the literary work of art, this preserver or potential preserver is the reader. Heidegger explains preservation as a function of the artwork itself: the more that work shows that it is, that it is a “unique” being that opens up a region or “worlds” (the latter term Heidegger wants us to hear as a verb), the more it removes itself from our everyday concerns.⁵⁸ The normal everyday concern with subjects and objects is overturned, and we find ourselves called to come to “dwell within the truth that is happening in the work.”⁵⁹ To respond to this call to come into such dwelling is to *want* to come to dwell there in the sense of resolving oneself upon it, described at *BT* 314

⁵⁶Ibid., 16-17, 32; see also 44 for art as truth and poiesis; cf. the appendix to Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” 59: a pure copy of an object, if the subject-object distinction were foundational, would not amount to artwork but just one more object. There would be no revealing of anything, and one could not even claim that the copy was a good or bad likeness. Indeed, Heidegger seems to imply here that the copy could not be seen as a copy, for even there the work of art is implied, but simply an unworked object, another thing in the object plane. The alternative realist view of art is captured by Patrick Mooney, who claims that art “imitates” the “*wrong objects altogether*” in that it does not attempt to imitate what is essential and authentically real, in this case, Plato’s Forms (195, original italics). Mooney never questions that, for Plato at least, art imitates and is an attempt at representation. See Patrick Mooney, “Republic X: What’s Wrong with Being a ‘Third Remove from the Truth’?” in *Desire, Identity, and Existence: Essays in Honor of T. M. Penner*, ed. Naomi Reshotko (Kelowna, BC, Canada: Academic Printing and Publishing, 2003), 195 and 204.

⁵⁷Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 40-41.

⁵⁸Ibid., 20-26, 40.

⁵⁹Ibid., 40.

as “to choose a kind of Being-one’s-Self.” This wanting to dwell with the work is to preserve it by and in persevering in the truth opened up and at work in it.

Preservation is a form of Being-with, an awakening to a different conception of self. Heidegger describes how we are no longer held “captive” to beings but are brought near to being, and in so doing we deconstruct the ego-subject: we must surrender to the artwork, not appreciate it nor make appreciation of it our personal “goal”; to dwell with the artwork is not to reflect on our experiences or align them to the artwork.⁶⁰ We are made to “belong” to the truth in the artwork, and this belonging “founds...being-with-one-another.”⁶¹ It is in the artwork, via the transportation into truth, that the author can be truly encountered as Dasein, a creator whose work is a happening of truth, though this work must now be understood precisely as not being the “possession” of a subject. Understanding the literary work of art, then, is to enter more authentically into humanity, is to call into question the meaning of the reader. Interpretations of literary artwork may masquerade as assertion, judgment, representations of experience, etc., but these interpretations themselves are made possible by a more “primordial” truth: the disclosing revelation of the text itself that demands a response, a desire to preserve it in some way.

The preservers of a work of art, however, are not as such those who collect, buy, sell, etc. pieces of art. According to Heidegger, such trade in art actually misses the reality that in art truth as revelation is at work, this blindness arising from considering

⁶⁰Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 41.

⁶¹Ibid. Also cf. Phillips, "From Radical to Banal Evil: Hannah Arendt against the Justification of the Unjustifiable," 151-2: "Being cannot be understood by an entity that withdraws itself from others and suppresses the truth of its Being-with-others just as fallenness into the everyday is, for Heidegger, in no way something negative and self-evidently inferior to the *vita contemplativa*."

artworks to be valuable objects, i.e., things that represent or symbolize financial value or social status. In Heidegger's more nuanced language, the work of art needs both creator (authors) and preservers (readers) in order to be the work that it is. The preservers "allow" the work of art to be itself, as it were, recognizing that Being is revealed and that in order for the work to be seen as work, they must "dwell" with it by suspending Dasein's typical subject-object orientation—only then does the work of art become a work of art, not an object of value (see above and page 40 of Heidegger's essay). As a final caveat, Heidegger warns us that the preservers are not temporally bound to the work, i.e., a work of art may have to await its preservers in the future, or its preservers may fall away and the work be forgotten. What is important for my purposes here is to see that Heidegger emphasizes in his own way the human quality of the work of art, the relationship between creators and preservers that the work both requires and is—the work itself becomes that space where both readers and authors share in the revelation of truth and the questioning of Being.

Such a questioning of Being in general cannot help but bring about a questioning of the "whoness" of the preserver, and in answering this question, the preserver enacts her own poiesis, that of transcending the self previously conceived as merely an ego-subject, an object-being or sign-being amongst others of the same kind. This self-transcendence not only annihilates any possibility of the reader's response being motivated by willpower or wish-fulfillment, but also helps us focus on questioning how such transcendence is achieved. The answer to this, discussed briefly in the introduction and to be explained further throughout this and the next chapter, is nothing or no-thing, the nameless, the

ineffable, that which has no meaning. It is the meaninglessness working in the heart of language and texts that holds open a space whereby beings are and prompts our own speaking (see again page 40 of Heidegger's essay), which provokes the reader (preserver) of the literary work of art to form a meaning in response to the disclosure of truth, poetically founding the self and coming closer to true individuality by maintaining that space where the work of art can continue to work through an interpretation of the work, i.e., the imaginative building/structuring of meaning. This is not to say that the reader cannot err in the response to the text (one can still be in an inauthentic mode and force interpretations onto the text, or simply make a mistake as an authentic reader), but that the literary work of art opens the space for (creates a horizon within which) the reader is able to err. Furthermore, authentic reading *may* itself require certain tools in order to reach authenticity, e.g., a particular text may require facility with certain foreign languages, or an understanding of certain fields of knowledge, or familiarity with other texts in order to be itself fully grasped. Such skills or information can help deepen our understanding of a text, but that understanding itself, the practice of reading, cannot be replaced by such aids. Again, we cannot fall back on the notion of truth being that of correctness, agreement, or being "right." From a more simplistic perspective, a reader's interpretation can be "wrong," but we must also understand that the reader is always "in" the truth in the reading of the literary work of art, even if the truth is denied or remains concealed. Reading, then, is that activity of responding, the activity of self-poiesis through meaning-creation, the dis-covery (unconcealing) of self not through any action the self accomplishes, as if the reader were consciously looking simultaneously from

without and within, building or constructing a being that she is. The implication of Heidegger's thought for my thesis is that the literary work of art constantly calls us into question by requiring us to preserve it as a working of truth, to "dwell" with it outside our usual sense of I-subject assuming a world of objects and in that assumption passing over the truth of beings. So considered, poiesis, response, and self have no finality or absoluteness, and the multiplicity of interpretations is itself part of the meaning of Being.

But Heidegger also helps us understand how we can misinterpret the work of art. If the artwork is considered only an object or representation (a sign of something else that is more "real," more in Being), our questioning of it will only be able to proceed from ourselves as subjects, and our assertions and judgments will pertain to this artwork-object and concern only the properties it maintains.⁶² Authentic questioning, however, originates with the work of art itself as a working or happening, otherwise we will conceive of it only as something that is supposed to affect us in some way, and in this affecting we will look for its "meaning."⁶³ Applying Heidegger's warning to my thesis, to approach the literary work of art as something that is only supposed to inspire certain emotions or cause particular beliefs in a subject is ultimately to find the meaning of text only in those emotions, memories, and experiences the text effects or affects. The reader in this instance will have indeed responded, but the meaning of the text will be only this network of personal "properties," in short the text will be only a reflection of the self, filled with the ego, the modern subject that finds itself everywhere faced with objects to

⁶²Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 42.

⁶³Ibid.

be categorized and used. But more important, this self that fills the text will not even be the authentic self, for it will not have yet been founded in its being-with-others, it will have no place in a world. It will be the self-as-object, a locus of properties, neither a questioning nor a response, what Heidegger calls in *BT* the “they-self,” “das Man,” the “fallenness” of Dasein.⁶⁴ The reader’s own authentic act of poiesis can only occur if that reader disappears as subject and allows herself to be questioned by the artwork.

As a final note on the non-objectivity of art and the non-subjectivity of the preserver, in the terms of this dissertation, the former as text and the latter as reader, Heidegger makes the following claim: the artwork sets something down and places something, but this is *not* another way of saying that the artwork makes something an object before an “I.”⁶⁵ Objects, for Heidegger, are passive entities with properties, and all relational power reverts to the subject; but artwork’s setting forth the work is something active, a placing of a boundary that allows things to become unconcealed and truth to happen.⁶⁶ The literary work of art is therefore something active, the setting forth of a

⁶⁴Stanley Cavell does not find the notion of *das Man* very robust or interesting, even though he sees parallels between Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s thought: “An admission of some question as to the mystery of the existence, or the being, of the world is a serious bond between the teaching of Wittgenstein and that of Heidegger. [...] Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger continue, by reinterpreting, Kant’s insight that the limitations of knowledge are not failures of it...Wittgenstein goes further than Heidegger in laying out how to investigate the cost of our continuous temptation to knowledge, as I would like to put it. In *Being and Time* the cost is an absorption in the public world, the world of the mass or average man.” He goes on to argue that *das Man* is “the least original and most superficial” part of “that uneven book.” For him, “the cost is the loss, or forgoing, of identity or of selfhood.” I would argue that Heidegger does point out this latter cost, and that Cavell has missed Heidegger’s crucial point that we are all *das Man*, but sometimes reach authenticity—we never move beyond the they-self permanently, as if moving up the evolutionary ladder. See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 241-2.

⁶⁵Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 53.

⁶⁶Ibid.

boundary being one act of poiesis (the author's), while preserving what has been unconcealed is the poetic activity of the reader. For artwork to be the work that it is means that neither author nor reader simply arrogate to themselves the power to grant meaning as subjects before passive objects, but means that both respond to a call and in so doing call themselves into question and find that they are together in their questioning. It is this being with others that calls the "I" into question and promises its re-invention as an authentic self.⁶⁷

Before embarking on what it means to be an authentic self, a sketch of Heidegger's notion of selfhood is necessary. Beginning with *BT*, Dasein does understand its existence as a self, but this self is not coincident with the body conceived as material substance, has nothing to do with a "me" that is present (312). Instead, the self is first understood not as self, but as what Heidegger calls the "they-self" or *das Man* (ibid.). We will actually see Sartre make a similar claim later on, positively stating that the self is only understood through others. For Heidegger, however, an authentic self is possible, but they-ness always pervades the human being, who is not "a free-floating self-projection" (321). In other words, the self should not be primarily understood as encapsulated within a body (a material ontology), or as an otherwise completely isolated entity held within the sphere of its own will (a psyche-soul ontology). Through a phenomenological investigation, both Heidegger and Sartre are concluding that neither

⁶⁷Roy Harris brings out the problem "philosophy" has had with language and meaning. Harris argues that "the whole problem of communication as construed in Western philosophy is a problem about how somatic particularity—the natural state of isolation of the individual—can be overcome." See Roy Harris, "The Role of the Language Myth in the Western Cultural Tradition," in *The Language Myth in Western Culture*, ed. Roy Harris (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 2002), 15. His terminology here, however, belies his own traditional metaphysical assumptions about Being and beings as "naturally" divided and materially embodied.

ancient (psyche-soul) nor modern (Cartesian ego) concepts of the human being are the ground or essence of self, but that self is instead first encountered as a refraction through others. For Heidegger, this means our “primordial” mode is that of having an understanding of being with others in a world. Furthermore, the possibilities of Being are never quite within reach even though Dasein is the basis of these possibilities, so Dasein never fully controls its being but exists as a “nullity” and “lags behind” its possibilities (330). As Heidegger puts it, Dasein is “not itself the basis of its Being” but is “the *Being* of its basis” (ibid., original italics). Heidegger essentially saves an understanding of the self (and the “I”) without resorting to any awareness of “objects” or an “external” world, which would immediately imply an “internal” one and is the result of the subject-object dualism he is critiquing and wants to avoid. The interior/exterior distinction could only occur if the self were a “self-projection” devoid of world (i.e., it would be its own world and “look out” on another), but Heidegger makes it clear that the self first comes to its own understanding by being with others, not by conceiving itself as a subject perceiving an “external” world.⁶⁸

⁶⁸At BT 367-368, Heidegger makes clear that to assume such “isolated interiority” is to make the I equivalent to a subject, a turn he attributes to Kant. The self then must take on the proportions of a being, something that is “selfsame” and “steady,” namely the self becomes equivalent to an object or “substance.” Heidegger continues by claiming that for Kant to assert that the I is an I think, then it must be an “I think something.” If this something is in the world, the world has been “presupposed” and its conditions should be explored, as Heidegger does. If this presupposition is ignored or never made, then the idea of the subject as “isolated interiority” is “legitimated” in that its own representations must now match up to an “external” world in order for knowledge, truth, and action to be possible. From a different perspective, in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, 10-12, Heidegger points out how the self or I is assumed to permeate everywhere and everything and does not make experience problematic since it is attached to everything. I would claim that this “typical” state is that of the they-self, where the unquestioned I brings about a concern only for objects to be used—to begin to question this self is to modify it, to be released from object-thinking, a possibility reading holds out to us.

Beginning with this understanding of the self leads to a wholly different concept of transcendence, that is, of coming to a new sense of self that overcomes the subject-object distinction. Instead of the self as subject transcending a series of objects or object-entities, as traditional metaphysical transcendence is defined, beings “as a whole” are transcended, and this includes the being that a particular person “exists,” as Heidegger puts it, focusing on the word’s etymology “to stand out,” implying that a space has been cleared, a “there.”⁶⁹ In this activity of transcendence, Dasein “comes toward that being that *it* is, and comes toward it *as* it ‘itself.’ Transcendence constitutes selfhood.”⁷⁰ The self, in other words, is not a subject-consciousness but something “always on the move” as it were, caught up in the constant, dynamic activity of being-in-the-world, for the world is that goal toward which Dasein transcends.⁷¹ To understand that world differently is to modify the self, and vice versa, and therefore change has nothing to do with manipulating objects or “willing” a different perspective that would somehow keep the world the same and simply change our experience of it. This transcendence is portrayed a bit differently in “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” but results in a similar conclusion. Being human is unique for, as described earlier in this chapter, it *is* unconcealment, what Heidegger calls being “in the open” (284). Heidegger asserts, contra Sartre, that it is only because we are in this open region that the wilful representation of other beings and consciousness of those representations are possible: “but consciousness does not itself

⁶⁹Heidegger, “On the Essence of Ground,” 108.

⁷⁰Ibid., original italics.

⁷¹Ibid., 109.

create the openness of beings, nor is it consciousness that makes it possible for the human being to stand open for beings” (ibid.). On the following page, however, Heidegger explains why the temptation to begin with the cogito (that is, the consciousness, the modern notion of the subject) exists. Our initial inclination in thinking about Being is metaphysical, which insists on understanding Being as a being or through beings, and as such considers the human self a substance or subject. Conceiving ourselves as an object-entity, we begin our thinking about Being through the most intimate of beings, the self. What I am trying to show throughout this chapter is that reading can help awaken us to the kind of transcendence described here, the change made possible by varying our understanding of beings and moving beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

Heidegger identifies the crux of the problem in thinking that reality is best captured by the subject-object schism in “On the Question of Being.”⁷² On page 310 of

⁷²There are several more places both in *BT* and the later essays where such a distinction is called into question, as well as notions of the self and consciousness: *BT* 150: to question the who of Dasein and reply that the who is identical with the I of the subject is to assume that Being is defined purely as what Heidegger calls the “present at hand.” He claims further that this assumption is made even if the one who asserts the absoluteness of the I-subject denies that persons are objects, that consciousness is a thing, or that the soul is a substance; *BT* 254: “‘*Consciousness of Reality*’ is itself a way of Being-in-the-world” original italics; on how the original meanings of subject and object have been reversed, see the appendix to “Phenomenology and Theology,” 58: the “*subjectum*” used to be “what exists independently (objectively), and *objectum* is what is merely (subjectively) represented”; in “From the Last Marburg Lecture Course,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) on Leibniz, Heidegger makes the point that for Leibniz and later moderns, I and Being became associated (69). At 71, although we understand being as Dasein, we do not “obtain the idea of being by recourse to ourselves as beings” but by being transcendent, which is understanding being not only as Dasein—we must overcome ourselves in some capacity; in “On the Essence of Ground,” 97, Heidegger grants that there is a not-ness between beings and Being, but that Being is not some thing “merely” negated, and that to think through the negation is to overcome “logical” negation. A little later at 108, he expands on the notion of transcendence, denying that it has anything to do with subjects overcoming objects, that no boundary line or “gap” exists between the subject and object such that the subject must “cross over” it while remaining unified within itself; in “Introduction to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 283, Heidegger explicitly denies that Dasein is just another word for consciousness, for such a synonymy would be to think only of beings. Instead, Dasein is the “locality of the truth of Being.” On the following page, Heidegger emphasizes that being “ectstatic” is not identical to standing out from an “interior consciousness”; in “Why Poets?” 229, Heidegger claims that objectivity falls

that essay, he explains that he crosses out the word “being” to prevent us from thinking that it is a thing that leads an independent existence that every now and again “confronts” us. Heidegger helps us to understand that the subject-object dichotomy rests on the assumption that absolute independence is a possibility, that is, the complete isolation of existents. Since so much arises together (Being and Dasein, self and others, world and person, etc.), and metaphysics itself depends on the relationships obtaining among such categories, Heidegger is able to demonstrate that the assumption of isolation is completely flawed in continuously begging the question, i.e., isolation is never complete isolation but isolation from something else that it requires in order to exist. In his essay “Hegel and the Greeks” on page 334, he criticizes once more the thinking that posits such a dichotomy, claiming that to make being depend on, or be relative to, the human being would be to turn humans into subjects and assert that being is a product of their will. In other words, the subject-object dichotomy reifies everything (including Being itself), but retains the human being at the center of Being as the most “real” entity.

Heidegger’s point here can be taken as demonstrating how the subject-object distinction reduces to a kind of solipsism, but he is primarily warning us that nothing

within consciousness’ purview, and so seems to imply an “inward” consciousness. To allow thinking to originate from something other than objects seems to imply the deconstruction of the subject-consciousness; in *The Principle of Reason*, 22 and 26, Heidegger ties together the rise of representational thinking and the advent of both objects and the subject. Such representational thinking has for its goal the “securing” of objects for use, including humans, and in so doing misses the human being’s true calling and humanity. At 65 in the same work, Heidegger asserts that this “new” form of thinking makes of being a simple “object” for consciousness, which gives rise to the concepts of will and intention. What is at stake is made clearer at 77 and 80: the rise of consciousness isolates every object from every other object, including the consciousness, and so spawns self-consciousness, sacrificing any notion of persons in the name of subjectivity, for now subjectivity is really based on the “lawfulness of reasons” that give us the “possibility of an object”; in *On the Way to Language*, 38, Heidegger repeats that “consciousness always mean[s] self-consciousness.” And so on.

stops us from thinking and positing such a division, that the eradication and disregard for beings (e.g., genocide, environmental degradation, etc.) arises precisely from such thinking. In “The Age of the World Picture,” this point is made still clearer. To define thinking purely as representation is to claim that the human is “co-present” with thinking about an object, to conceive of the human as “given,” a subject (82). Founding the subject in this way is not to “become an I-ness” (an authentic self, an individual), but to make the ontological claim that humanity is the center of reference for truth, for Being (83). From such a perspective, Being becomes the product of the human will, and the subject, the region of this representation, becomes the consciousness (84). Given these arguments, never to move beyond our first assumptions about beings as merely objects (texts not as art, but reducible to assertion with which we agree or disagree) is to sacrifice not only any chance of understanding ourselves as where truth happens, but also any chance of respecting or caring for others as co-creators of meaning and truth. As a consequence, Being, world, and others fall into the power of our representations, our particular system of beliefs, and both strife and destruction seem to be the corollary of this tragic yet reversible fall.

One can wonder, then, how one should see what is present, if not as an object. Heidegger gives us a clue to such a different way of seeing on page 82 of *The Principle of Reason*. He claims there that the ancient Greeks had no understanding of objects in our modern sense, but conceived of what we call “objects” as what he translates as “over-against.” The latter is characterized by surprise, a sudden “hearing and viewing” of something that lets it be and “look out” at us; in short, a source of wonder. As a result, to

no longer ground thinking by positing objects is to no longer feel the need to represent Being to ourselves, no longer feel tempted to reify Being when we think about it, although much of that thinking is a response to beings themselves.⁷³ Such a way of understanding our Being-within-the-world offers us the hope of de-objectifying ourselves, of modifying our “theyness” (*das Man*) to be a more authentic self that will resolve to listen to others and authentically hear discourse. It is this being with others and its effect on the self that I will more fully explore in the rest of this chapter through the work of Sartre.

Part V: Sartre, the Text, and the Other⁷⁴

A human being is not a thing.
Heidegger

Sartre’s thinking is important for my discussion of self, others, and text in essentially two respects: on the one hand, a dialogue between him and Heidegger helps me to explore the relationship between the reader and the text even though I am in many respects opposed to Sartre’s theory of the for-itself versus the in-itself, the consciousness and its objects; on the other hand, Sartre more fully than Heidegger explores the desires that motivate persons and what grounds those desires, namely the conflict and relationship with others. We have already seen in the preceding section that artwork

⁷³Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 67.

⁷⁴It is abundantly clear that both Heidegger and Sartre thought the other in the wrong. Heidegger claimed that Sartre simply accepted the subject-object or consciousness-object divide and did not adequately question the ground of this distinction; for his part, Sartre felt that Heidegger had not adequately explored the meaning of Dasein, its appearance in a body, the relative lack of importance of death, etc. else he would have concluded the radical isolation of Dasein from Being. In the interests of full disclosure, I find Heidegger’s thinking much more persuasive, as has become obvious throughout this chapter.

brings together artists and preservers, and so the final step of exploring that togetherness becomes necessary. I will explore through Sartre's work how reading calls the I of the reader into question, and how this deconstruction of "consciousness," in Sartre's terminology, does not reduce to a simple attack on solipsism nor produce universal formulae that leave the unique individuality of the reader behind. The rest of this chapter will interweave a critique of Sartre's concept of consciousness with an appreciation of his contributions to our understanding of human desires and those others who inhibit and/or inspire those desires, helping me to demonstrate that in denying the absolute consciousness of the reader, we do not somehow "lose" the reader, but save both the self of the reader and the artistry that is the text and implicates an author.

Prior to Sartre's "classic" work *Being and Nothingness* (hereafter *BN*), in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he had already proposed his own concept of consciousness, namely that it only becomes aware of itself by becoming aware of a "transcendent" object, essentially something not itself.⁷⁵ Sartre never really questions this opposition of consciousness and objects, for it is the opposition itself that becomes the engine that drives his entire philosophy in *BN*. Throughout the entirety of his work, Sartre either allows the assumption that there are subjects and objects to go unquestioned, or he makes explicit that our understanding of reality *must* originate with the consciousness.⁷⁶ He

⁷⁵Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 40.

⁷⁶Already in *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber (London: Routledge, 2004), 7, Sartre asserts that consciousness has different modes of relation to objects; the language of objects versus consciousness will be used throughout *BN*; at *BN* 133, Sartre asserts that the

feels confident in asserting such a division for he denies that consciousness is a “region” within us, or that the ego somehow “controls” consciousness,⁷⁷ and claims instead that consciousness does not have to reflect on itself in order to be, in short that consciousness does not demand explicit self-consciousness, that is, “thetic” consciousness of itself.⁷⁸ In Sartre’s concern for the sanctity of the person and the necessity of personal responsibility, he wants to deny that any “hidden” forces exist, that anything uses the human being as a kind of puppet. It is this denial of either an external force or a “mysterious” inner mechanism controlling human behavior that helps ground my claim that meaning-creation through reading is a responsibility (ability to respond) of the reader that opens the way to a discovery (unconcealing) of the self through others.

The little that Sartre has to say about reading and language suggests that he tends to think of the text as something the meaning of which is either to be decoded or left

study of “human reality” begins with the Cartesian cogito. On the following page, he explicitly denies the adequacy of Heidegger’s Dasein, claiming that there must be a “consciousness of understanding” that confers on the individual the possibility of a unique understanding of existence, otherwise everything would fall into the realm of the unconscious.

⁷⁷Both these claims would be problematic by implying a more substantial reality “behind” the ego as it were, whereas Sartre thinks consciousness is the bedrock of the human sense of reality and is the mode of being human, of how we think, perceive, feel, etc.

⁷⁸On consciousness not being a region, see *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, 5; see 12 for the claim that consciousness can be both “unreflective” and “nonthetic”; in *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, 32, Sartre tells us that the “ego is a being of the world, like the ego of another” and not inside anything. It seems that Sartre feels that by denying an inner “I,” he avoids the criticism of the subject-object distinction, namely that it leads to either solipsism or a positing of the existence of things that goes against the grain of Husserl’s phenomenology. At 42 and throughout, Sartre makes certain his readers understand that the I does not produce consciousness. Cf. Altieri: “For if consciousness as thinking is a way of relating to specific activities, then all self-consciousness can give is awareness of the self acting in a particular way. It cannot give us an entity called the self.” See Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory,” 1404.

purely to the desire of the reader.⁷⁹ What is not denied, however, is the existence of others implied in language nor the responsibility of meaning-creation.⁸⁰ I will save a discussion of freedom and responsibility for the conclusion, but I should point out here a great difference between Sartre's ideas and the account I am offering in this dissertation. For Sartre, responsibility has its everyday meaning of "answering for" or "owning up to" one's actions and not laying the genesis of that action at the feet of another person, a deity, an ideology, etc. As is apparent, I have taken a more Heideggerian turn with the word, wanting to hear it as "response-ability," the potential and capacity to "reply to" something, from which more basic ground "answering for" something, the everyday notion of responsibility, is made possible. I do not deny the Sartrean "definition," for I too believe that readers should and must lay claim to the meanings they create, but I would emphasize the symbiotic relationship at the heart of being able to lay claim to something, i.e., something already has a claim on us. Responsibility indeed implies

⁷⁹Sartre still seems to be under the sway of a Saussurean or otherwise semiotic theory of language given his consistent claim that language is a system of signs. For examples, see: Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, 21 and also 64, where he claims that the reader is only a "spectator" who is being "guided" by "signs," i.e., words. At 65, he expands on this notion of sign in a thoroughly anti-Wittgenstein, anti-Heidegger way: words are like "containers" that "signify objects." At 83, he claims that words are not images, but he seems to be taking this quite literally in that words do not "resemble" the things to which they are attached, and continues to aver that words are objects attached to other objects. On the following page, Sartre gives us a rationale for insisting that words are signs: as such, words can teach us about things because they are "external" to those things—images cannot teach us because they have an "internal" relationship to what they are an image of. At 85, this amounts to a certain incoherence in Sartre's thought when he claims that there is a "verbal tendency in every image." In *BN*, Sartre's thinking that language is no more than a symbolic system does not seem to change. See for example 35, though this is now tempered with the claim that the essence of language is pure intersubjectivity: "Language...is originally being-for-others; that is, it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other" (485). However, on the next page, Sartre emphatically denies Heidegger's claim that "language speaks" and not human beings.

⁸⁰See note 71 and also *BN* 487: "Language reveals to me the freedom (the transcendence) of the one who listens to me in silence." In this way, language is "problematic," like the body. At 663, Sartre tells us that the "foundation" of language is freedom. For Sartre, freedom implies responsibility and vice versa.

freedom. However, that freedom in turn implies there is no a priori structure of meaning, but instead that the work of the reader is built on the nothingness of meaning (nothingness, not an object or defined set of concepts that fixes meanings for all time), what I have termed in this dissertation as “the grammar of the inexpressible,” that is, language that cannot be expressed before an encounter with the author of that expression, maintaining that there are indeed both authors and readers, that humanity is not a mass of sameness nor is one human being simply identical to another in her “essence.” The grammar of the inexpressible is an awareness of our unique mode of being that is otherwise referred to as individuality, a recognition that the inexpressible is not so much the unspeakable as it is the region of origination and creation, not a failure of description or simple inability to fully and adequately define categories.

Yet even for Sartre, freedom and the possibility of discovering meanings are not the qualities of *completely* isolated beings. At BN 473, Sartre explains how our “meaning,” the grasp we have on our own existence or the interpretation of that existence, cannot be achieved in isolation. As a consciousness, the human being exists only through being conscious of not being everything else, as a For-Itself, not the In-Itself. This is a continuous process and one that does not allow for reflection as if from some exterior point of view. In other words, the human being is constantly engaged in the world, even if that engagement is nothing but denial of the world, and can never reach a point where it can step outside its consciousness to have a totalizing view of every decision made, every

action taken.⁸¹ It is difficult to know if Sartre's notion of world is anything more than the perceptible system of objects that word is usually assumed to refer to, but it seems safe to say that it does not attain the degree of explicit articulation Heidegger gives to his idea of world. Regardless, to step outside consciousness would, according to Sartre, be nothing more than to cease to exist, for this is all that consciousness is, awareness of something. In that sense, this kind of "transcendental reflection" upon itself as an object within its own experiential field is denied it. On the contrary, it is only another human being who can have such an "objective" point of view of me, who can gather via such a viewing all the strands of my self together and interpret them. In my desire to know myself, then, I must engage others, and the primary form of that engagement is linguistic communication.⁸²

Up to this point, Sartre seems to be faintly echoing Wittgenstein's assertion that there can be no private language while also falling to Heidegger's critique in that he has left unquestioned that schema of a subject-consciousness faced with objects. But we should be able to see at least that language for Sartre is not something "owned" by a subjectivity, that there can be no claim to a purely "personal" meaning. In this way, he allows us to conceptualize reading as an intersubjective phenomenon, something that

⁸¹Roy, however, criticizes Sartre for basing his conception of being and nothingness too much on a model of sensory perception. See Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*, 15.

⁸²In the introduction to *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Williams and Kirkpatrick claim that stepping outside consciousness would result in a "Brahmanic annihilation of consciousness" (25); at BN 320, and throughout the section on the Other, Sartre says that the Other "is a necessary stage for the development of self-consciousness; the road of interiority passes through the Other." I would point out that his language is rife with the reification of interior and exterior.

assumes not only a shared world, however that term be taken, but a world full of others who hold the “key” as it were to our own interpretation. On a Sartrean view, the writer of the text desires to engage the others, to “complete” her own interpretation of existence and self; at the same time, the reader receives this revelation in the form of another’s (the author’s) language and can more fully explore her own being. We cannot assume that we are transparent to ourselves when we pick up a text and read, as if we had a clear vision of our being in the absence of others, in the absence of the text. Applying this Sartrean thesis to my own, the very desire to read the text is the tacit assumption of our incompleteness, our ignorance of ourselves, and we are in the very process of constructing that self in the reading activity, in clarifying our reflection on our ability to interpret, to build a meaning for the text.

Once more, we find ourselves faced with the task of poiesis, not passivity toward the text. Only the most overt bibliophiles love texts for themselves, regardless of whether they have been read. More precisely, bibliophiles love the objects called “books” more than they love texts proper. But that sense of unshakeability in our interpretation when we have read a well-loved text, that feeling of needing the text, of never abandoning the text given its impact on us, this is something that indeed Sartre helps to explain. In Heidegger’s terms, if *Dasein* is the Being-uncovering, then the clearing of the self that Sartre, following Heidegger, declares to be one of the primary functions of language is the growing awareness of how each human being, as a “function” of its being, discovers (uncovers, unconceals) entities. This power to reveal lets us view the text as offering us the possibility of clarification, of illumination, though it is not so much the text alone that

illuminates but the activity of reading, the answering in this disjointed form of conversation, the delayed hearer responding to the distant speaker brought near. As a result of this illumination, we often feel we understand things better after reading certain texts, and we feel personally attached to this new understanding, the truth we have in turn created from the reading. But in authentic reading this truth is not ours in the mode of possession, in the mode of an object, but in the mode of what Heidegger would call our “ownmost possibility.” As refracted through others, possibilities of Being have been made clearer to us and we have awakened to certain discoveries of ourselves. As Sartre points out, others are needed for this discovery of possible modes of Being, truth in the revelatory sense, for our truth, in the gross sense of subjective ownership, would require no other person, no communication, simply the declaration of our wishes, desires, judgments. Whether we “see” it or not, reading brings us into contact with the world, with entities, with others, and as Heidegger has shown us, truth should be understood to be a “trait” of entities themselves, though the being who is the discovery of entities and the “there” of truth is always Dasein.

Accepting that we are “engaged” and find ourselves concerned with a world, our approach to that world entails a certain amount of risk. For Sartre, to care for anything is to open ourselves to the possibility of objectifying that which we care about in an attempt to make it obey our desires. We can objectify another person by considering her only a body, the self likewise by considering it only a body, an animal, a book, or even an utterance; in short, anything can come to have a value only insofar as we consider it useful to ourselves. When we engage the text and desire to read it, to discover

(unconceal) it for ourselves, this care too can result in reifying the text and whatever interpretation(s) we give to it. From this perspective, the interpretation we give to texts are forms of discourse, and as such are available to others, similar to “objects” anyone can take up and make her own. It is this sense of ownership that provides us with the phenomenon of attachment to our meanings, our sense of needing to defend ourselves against contradictory interpretations. But in so doing, we hide from ourselves the nature of poiesis, its groundedness in others, in the world, in Heidegger’s “house of Being” that is language, in the intersubjectivity of Wittgenstein’s language game. We treat our own interpretation as an object to be wielded, as a dead language, and in so doing we radically divorce ourselves from the text, from the author, and from the unconcealing work that is the text. To genuinely hear the text, we instead must allow our own readings to remain at a distance from ourselves, to let our responses return to what called for them, to remain in question ourselves knowing full well our response will be heard and in the hearing, changed.

Taking up, using, constructing, changing, all these usages imply the essential importance of human creativity, broadly put, the imagination. Whereas the concepts of language expressed in Wittgenstein’s, Heidegger’s, and Sartre’s works have led us to see language use as a creative and imaginative activity, Sartre is unique in making the “faculty” of the imagination both a philosophical and psychological theme of his work. The next section extrapolates from Sartre’s analysis of the imagination what is at stake for the self in the process of meaning-creation, and though I find Sartre’s text on the

imagination deeply flawed in places, it is nonetheless thought-provoking and a necessary part of the investigation into poesis.

Part VI: Sartre and the Imagination

We are moving within language, which means moving on shifting ground or, still better, on the billowing waters of an ocean.

Heidegger

Sartre's work on the psychology of the imagination deals explicitly with the formation, meaning, and importance of mental images or "pictures."⁸³ Although he at times explicitly discusses reading in connection with this notion of the imagination, he does so largely in the context of the interplay of imagination and emotion with regard to reading fiction, and how fiction can make us feel that we are experiencing the life of the protagonist. Although this is a fascinating treatment and well worth studying and contemplating, such an argument is a bit too specific for what I have in mind for this

⁸³Beata Stawarska maintains that Sartre has two conflicting theories of imagination: one is "pictorial representation," the other is an active type of creation, where one imagines herself living as an other, which for Stawarska questions the thesis that "the cogito defines subjectivity" (87). Basing her work on Husserl's theory of the imagination or "presentification," she claims that there is a "division at the heart of the imaginary subject [that] points to a form of intra-subjective *alterity* manifest within imaginary experience" (89, original italics). She explains that for Sartre, the image is "different in kind" from perception, and is not a "weak version" of perception as Hume maintained. Imaging is a different form of "intending the object" (99). This leads Stawarska to arguing that Sartre now has two theories of the image, image as "object" or "picture," and image as "relation" to objects, with the first leading back to the Humean notion and materialism. She concludes that Sartre should have been forced, according to his own description of the "alterity" of the imagination, to question the Cartesian cogito and its "unity." See Beata Stawarska, "Pictorial Representation or Subjective Scenario? Sartre on Imagination," *Sartre Studies International: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Existentialism and Contemporary Culture* 7, no. 2 (2001): 87, 89, 94, 99, 100, and 107. James Steeves paraphrases Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of Sartre's theory of the image this way: "The object of perception is not mediated by images in the mind, but emerges within a context that the subject has partially created by endowing the world with meaning" (371). For his part, Steeves criticizes Sartre for making perception and imagination mutually exclusive, claiming that "bodily" imagination "structures perception" so that one can "encounter" objects. See James B. Steeves, "The Virtual Body: Merleau-Ponty's Early Philosophy of Imagination," *Philosophy Today* 45, no. 4 (2001): 371 and 377. Casey seems to agree with Sartre that one cannot learn from an image, that imaging is "inherently circular" in that we cannot find out something "radically" new that we did not know before. Both Casey and Sartre seem overly concerned with the epistemological with regard to the imagination, implying that knowledge and learning is primarily about properties or materials. See Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 8.

dissertation. The value that I place on Sartre's *The Imaginary* (hereafter *TI*) is more on what I can extrapolate from it regarding the human ability and propensity toward creativity, and what that creativity, "imagination" in its more general sense today, in turn implies about the activity of reading.

Two of Sartre's more pertinent claims in *TI* is that readers, when reading, are in the "presence of a world" and that when we imagine something, our consciousness is turned toward that something, that we are indeed in the presence of that something.⁸⁴ The first claim depends on Sartre's notion that consciousness is a "unitary" phenomenon, both hypothesis and conclusion of the entire *TI*. It may have several modes, but it is all one, and therefore consciousness is always consciousness, first and foremost, of the In-Itself. From this point of view, there is no "other" world which the imagination inhabits, that is somehow completely discrete and separate from the world of our "everyday" consciousness. Sartre makes this claim in order to respect the power imagination has and explain that power, not as another kind of perception (as Coleridge would have it),⁸⁵ but as having a direct impact on our lives in "this" world, so to speak. According to Sartre, if

⁸⁴*TI* 64, 83.

⁸⁵See for example his letter to Thomas Poole, October 16, 1797. Barth argues that "Coleridge's idea of imagination is built on the notion of 'polarity,' upon a 'balance or reconciliation of opposites,'" and that there is "an innate and active participation of the imagination in the eternal creative act that empowers it." See J. Robert Barth, "Mortal Beauty: Ignatius Loyola, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and the Role of Imagination in Religious Experience," *Christianity and Literature* 50, no. 1 (2000): 72. In a later work, Barth cites John Coulson as claiming that "Coleridge...perpetuates the older, alternative tradition—that a language is a living organism [...] For him the primary response to language is not analytic but fiduciary." See Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination*, 130. Although I believe Coleridge never questions the traditional metaphysical view of language, I have great respect for his imbuing the imagination, and therefore texts and reading, with sacrality. Stawarska argues that Sartre's own notion of "suspension of belief" (the flip-side of Coleridge's "suspension of disbelief") is itself intentional and not due to "indifference," a "lack" of belief, or "ignorance" of something's existence. See Stawarska, "Pictorial Representation or Subjective Scenario? Sartre on Imagination," 102.

the imagination were another faculty, not only would we have the difficulty of explaining another world very much like but altogether different from this one, we could relegate reading and the creativity it entails to that realm and that realm only. Indeed, reading, art, music, etc. would be epiphenomena in our daily existence, without real importance and only vaguely interesting as a form of entertainment or an outlet for the emotions. By asserting that consciousness is unitary, Sartre makes the imagination and its products an integral part of our daily lives and indeed an integral part of consciousness itself. The apparent contradiction of Sartre's stating that there are as many worlds as there are texts as well as only one world can be resolved by momentarily referring to Heidegger: Dasein in each and every case interprets its own existence and adopts a "perspective" on Being; there are not many "Beings," though there are innumerable interpretations of Being. That world is particular to a human being, but its communicability betrays the fact that it is indeed a world anyone can enter, is indeed the world of our intersubjective Being-with.

The result, then, is what we have already seen in Sartre's concept of language in *BN*. From a Sartrean point of view, readability implies others, implies the shared world and the constant pursuit of the self as it flees from us and toward others. To read is to uncover what the text is about, something which does not inhabit a separate world called "the imaginary world," some purely internal geography. Sartre does not question the "existence" of the imaginary, but instead opts to call it the "irreal."⁸⁶ There is a haunting echo here of Aristotle's *De Anima* and his claim there that communication is secured by the "form" of the subject under discussion being shared by both the speaker and the

⁸⁶*TI* 140.

hearer.⁸⁷ What is imagined is always something others already “have,” as it were, for the possibility of sharing or communicating what is imagined through discourse is presupposed, regardless of the art’s status as a unique “product” of an individual creator. The production (the author’s imaginative activity) and reading (the reader’s imaginative hearing) of the text presupposes involvement with other persons and is grounded in that involvement.

But Sartre denies that the imagination alone or its use “causes” behavior. Such a claim is vastly important for this context, for meaning-creation in my terms is an imaginative act, but not the result or product of “seeing” something, as if constrained by the properties of an object. We must understand that for Sartre, desire is the engine that drives the human being.⁸⁸ The image is a product of a unified consciousness, therefore it is the product of desire: we imagine what we want to imagine. As the product of our desire, the image cannot motivate us to do anything (it is the sum of our motivations, as it were), for to claim such would be to posit the image as a free entity within its own world, which it expressly is not according to Sartre’s philosophy. This has a double impact on how to conceptualize reading: on the one hand, we cannot treat the discourse that is the text (the imaginative structure of the author) as a discrete object that has the power to

⁸⁷*De Anima* 3.4.429b20-430a5, 3.3.429a10-20. Victor Caston argues that Aristotle needs the imagination (*phantasia*) not simply for image production, but to signify something “outside” consciousness. He makes the interesting claim that Aristotle used imagination in this way in order to explain error, distinguished from “sensation” and “conception.” He argues that imagination for Aristotle is a way of giving “content” to “mental states,” that is, how these states can be “intentional” in general. In this way, Aristotle can claim that there is nothing “inherent” to the imagination’s “content” that forces us either to accept or deny it. Caston concludes that the *phantasmata* are “not themselves viewed, nor are they tiny pictures [of] objects in the world,” but make up thoughts themselves. See Victor Caston, “Why Aristotle Needs Imagination,” *Phronesis: A Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 41, no. 1 (1996): 21n3, 22, 45, and 51-2.

⁸⁸*TI* 107-108.

cause human action, as if the words “composing” the text amounted to only so much behavioral stimuli. As I have remarked in the preceding chapters, to claim that reading a text “caused” one to believe something is to put the responsibility for belief or action on the text itself, making it analogous to an external force, like gravity causing things to fall toward the center of the Earth; as a result of denying the text this causative power, what we ultimately think about the text we must realize to be intimately related to the how of our existence, and desire is a function of that how. Sartre would claim that such meaning-creation is an act that demands our vigilance, for it is a revelation of our own desires for the world. To disown this creation as if it were simply the independent offspring of the text is to act in bad faith, to fail to see that it is our interpretation (the analogous form of Sartre’s “imaging consciousness”)⁸⁹ that provokes our action, if any action is to arise from reading. Expanding Sartre’s concept of the image beyond that of mental visualization, we can say that reading “imagines” the text holistically, and the meaning which we construct that arises from reading the text already speaks out of a deep desire for meaning, as well as possibly out of our own personal desires to “see” what we want in the text. The desire for meaning in general, the desire to imagine through poesis reveals itself to be an ontological structure of the human being, the very thing that makes the For-itself realize it is *not* the In-itself. As the language of a different consciousness, the text cannot itself be the cause of any activity on the reader’s part, including the activity of interpretation. It may be the source of interpretation, the ground of that interpretation, but it determines no interpretation.

⁸⁹Ibid., 136-137.

As a final remark regarding the imagination, it is fruitful to show how its role in forming meaning contrasts with the theory of meaning Frege and his philosophical descendants, including Russell with his “logical atomism” and the later logical positivists, promulgated. The concept of poiesis discussed here and in the preceding chapter also reveals the shortcomings of any thinking which insists that meaning depends on some form of reference, a kind of linguistic realism. Sartre makes the point that the image as a product of the imaging consciousness is not at all like a physical object that can be examined from every angle, can be observed, and can sometimes surprise us with its own manifestations.⁹⁰ Meaning-creation through reading is not therefore akin to invention, but, as Sartre explores, reading is a kind of waking dream, and the world of that dream is not a world in which we care about perception, let alone about the assignments of properties to objects.⁹¹ “Imagining” the text therefore does not in any way involve the analysis of sentences as to their referents as if some comparison with those referents will give us the truth (always conceived as correctness and a function of agreement) of those sentences, and thereby, cumulatively, the meaning of the text as a whole, a meaning that determines what value the text holds in our world. Instead, the text puts us in the presence of entities, but those entities are always interpreted (Heidegger’s *Auslegung*) from a certain point of view (the author’s) and given to us in that point of view, whereby

⁹⁰Ibid., 7-10.

⁹¹Ibid., 165-6, 168-9. In an essay on guided imagery in psychology that seems to support the link between imagining and thinking differently, Avy Joseph remarks that “there is a correlation between the ability to image and the capacity to enter into an altered state of consciousness, including the hypnotic state.” See Avy Joseph, “The Impact of Imagery on Cognition and Belief Systems,” *European Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* 5, no. 4 (2004): 13.

we take them up again originally from our own perspective, but if we authentically hear the text and partake in the discourse, we give ourselves the possibility of forming a new perspective.⁹² The meaning of the text thus depends on this discourse with another, not on sentences agreeing with or attempting to properly represent objects, a practice of forming meaning that dramatically limits possibilities and hides beings (including ourselves) from view. As Heidegger tells us, simply in assuming that entities are best understood as objects, we have already made an interpretative move and have relocated the place and meaning of truth away from entities and into our judgments regarding those entities, i.e., knowledge (and so what is considered “truth”) is now a matter of justifiable belief, not disclosure. Sartre too recognizes that his ontology means he must discuss truth, but he does so from the standpoint of knowledge and ignorance. It is to this discussion that we now turn.

Part VII: Ignorance, Knowledge, and the Inexpressible

Everything spoken stems in a variety of ways from the unspoken.
Heidegger

Sartre claims that truth is the totality of Being, not simply what is revealed to a single subject, and that therefore truth is neither a passivity (what he considers the mode of perception) nor an activity (what he considers the mode of representation), but rather a creativity that lets be, “to create what is.”⁹³ As is evident, Sartre still approaches reality

⁹²Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, 181-86.

⁹³Jean-Paul Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, trans. Adrian van den Hoven (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 5.

from within a structure of subjects facing objects.⁹⁴ However, if we allow language, and therefore texts, to be this permissive creativity Sartre describes, we can see what meaning-creation cannot be either for Sartre or in terms of this dissertation: it cannot be the product of perception (the activity of a subject viewing an object), in that perception is an attitude toward entities insofar as it contains desire and is never the pure reception of data but includes judgments regarding our ends—we “pick out” that which we hear, see, etc., through our desire, according to the “outline” of our possibilities. If we hear Heidegger through Sartre, we know that truth is not in our attitudes toward entities, for this notion of truth implies a robust notion of subjectivity and includes, but is not limited to, the correct assignation of properties to objects (correct description of or correct beliefs about an object) and/or the reifying of a “worldview” (a holistic interpretation of all beings such that the interpreter “speaks for” Being and attempts to dispense with whatever truth beings have in favor of categorizing them for later use) or “subjective” (aesthetic) experience. In this type of thinking criticized by both Sartre and Heidegger, the “I” remains the unquestioned axis around which the world rotates and remains hidden, undisclosed, for truth and freedom are not seen as “traits” of the entities perceived but of the perceiver. At the other end of the scale, neither language nor meaning-creation is a system of signs and so cannot be equivalent to representation, nor is meaning or language in general structured solely on the basis of one individual’s knowledge or ideas. As Heidegger ever insists, the possibility of representation and concept-formation itself

⁹⁴See again Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers*, 15 for a similar critique.

presupposes that language has already “cleared the way” for the manifestation of beings that allows them to be represented or understood through the concepts we form of them. Language and texts, the mode of dis-covering entities, cannot be truth according to such theoretical views (reference, semiosis, etc.), and to consider the poiesis of meaning as if it were a function of reference or a mode of representation is therefore to misunderstand the various interrelationships obtaining among reading, reader, text, and author(s).

For Sartre, the discussion of truth returns us to the totality of Being. If consciousness is unified, then it is conscious of the In-Itself all at once and finds itself in this totality at every turn. It is consequently in Being and from it that we move, that we think, that we imagine, that we read. As if standing before Being, we are “in the posture of an outline of behavior,” the future of what is, possibilities that we can construct and upon which we can build.⁹⁵ Following such thinking, we should realize that the text is within this totality, that in reading the text, in hearing the discourse of another, we move through Being, we form our possibilities of interpretation. The text becomes yet another entity, the surrogate speaker as it were, and as such it presents to us a potentiality for Being and must be engaged at that level. In Sartrean terms, reading as a mode of consciousness does not distinguish between something called a text and something else called “the real world.” That text is part of the world, part of the entirety of Being, and so we interpret (in Heidegger’s German: *auslegen*) it and build our own being from it as we do from the world. To construct in this way is not to “manufacture” Being as if it were an artifact, for we—and any manufacturing of artifacts we may engage in—are always already

⁹⁵Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, 11.

within Being, and language and the interpretation of texts are not artifacts but projections into a future, the horizon of which is also within Being.⁹⁶ To accomplish this projection, so Sartre argues, we must be able to imagine a possibility, to negate the evidence of Being and beings before us and re-envision the world; the possibility of non-Being must be real.⁹⁷

To take from Sartre a working model of reading, we must posit the reader in the mode of negation, in that by forming a belief about or constructing a meaning for this text, the reader must be able to move beyond the text—to make it absent, as it were. The reader does not simply transmit as it were an interpretation of the text *from* the text itself, but must imagine a future where the text is now “part” of the reader’s world. This projection into a future constructs a meaning for the text. It is coming up against this absence that structures what I call the grammar of the inexpressible. That sense that there is always a gap, a space, between what we think the text means, the beliefs we have formed about the text in the reading of it (distinguishing between beliefs *about* the “subject matter” of the text—or more properly, about the “about-which” the text talks “about”—and beliefs taken *out of* the text *from* its own language, for example, moral maxims stated in the text, etc.) and the text itself, this gap that seems to elude description and prove difficult to capture in words, indicates this very process of poesis itself. We are thrown back on our own assets, on our own imaginings, and so we must build based on how we interpret Being, which includes the text but is not determined by the text.

⁹⁶Ibid., 14.

⁹⁷Ibid.

This ineffable quality of negation can also be termed “meaninglessness” in that by making the text absent, in creating a space for interpretation, the reader comes to understand that there is no referent, not even the text itself, that will once and for all secure a meaning for the text. This quality is analogous to both my first description of ineffability in the introduction and to what Wittgenstein has helped us already see as described in chapter 2, namely that there is no a priori meaning to words, no secure chamber that we can unlock whose secrets will reveal the ultimate meaning and truth of the text. Let me reiterate that we can assert as much and very often do. That we often behave as if the text had a key to its own mystery, as if the text interpreted itself, as if the meaning we arrive at is obvious and readily understood, as if any beliefs to which we are inspired upon the reading of the text are simply the effect of the text itself. In short, we often discuss literary works of art as if they excluded the reader, or, turning the other way, as if their only artistic value were embedded in the stylistic whims of the reader alone. As we are in constant danger of technologizing the world and objectifying beings, as Heidegger makes clear in “The Question Concerning Technology,” so we are in constant danger of objectifying the text, of turning it into a tool that manipulates the mind and human desire, or a mere thing whose properties we can determine and dispose of, its truth assumed yet remaining concealed.

But without objectifying the text, we must understand how we can “learn” through our own activity of imagination as poiesis, regardless of Sartre’s contention that one cannot learn from images. The act of writing is already an act of seeing-as, is already an imagined possibility offered to us through discourse, and as utterance, can now be seen as

what Heidegger would call present-at-hand in the world. It may seem that our own imaginings are confined by what is already imagined in the text, but what is already imagined in the text is a poetic product, a construction of meaning; that which the text is about, however, is offered to all, and so we engage the text (learn from it) on that universal level, free to negate what it presences in order to create another possibility, as we are free to negate the present itself in pursuit of our ends projected into a future. The purely subjective perspective, if it could exist (and it is worth noting how Sartre recalls Wittgenstein in questioning the very possibility of solipsism) would be incommunicable, unintelligible.

Sartre comes to a similar conclusion regarding the power of negation, a power that, for my purposes here, is analogous to struggling to put an end to the crisis of meaninglessness into which an encounter with the ineffable brings us, overcoming what was not and could not be expressed by us (for we are not the author of this “new” expression, this new, “strange” use of language) through the poetic act of forming a meaning. Sartre claims that we exist before Being in an anticipatory and revelatory mode, on the one hand uncovering truth, on the other negating Being in order to “possibilize” a future.⁹⁸ He declares that our consciousness becomes enriched the more projects it has, the more of Being it reveals and therefore the more possible futures that are open to it.⁹⁹ The fact of all these possibilities, that they can grow or diminish depending on the revelatory power of a particular consciousness, implies for Sartre the

⁹⁸Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, 15.

⁹⁹Ibid.

necessity of freedom within Being, for it is Being that will guide our creativity.¹⁰⁰ If a priori categories governed the possibility itself of possible futures, these futures would be determined, and how much we reveal or conceal, how much we can anticipate, would not exist for us—the for-itself would collapse into the in-itself and consciousness would cease to exist, which evidently does not happen. Freedom itself is not a choice of what Sartre calls “external” possibilities, as if we were “free” simply to choose from a number of given futures.¹⁰¹ Instead, freedom is embedded in Being and therefore embedded in our own action in the face of Being, for every action implies its own possibility and the ground (perhaps reason) that supports that possibility—in other words, all actions could have been otherwise.¹⁰² We do not necessarily reflect on this at every turn, nor is such reflection required for us to make decisions, but freedom so conceived is very much a part of our ontological constitution, and as such, Sartre’s idea of freedom here more than that in *BN* closely resembles Heidegger’s.

Such guidance by another, the dislocating of freedom outside the personal will or subject, reveals the fragility of our poiesis as discourse with others. The truth of language, and so the truth of meaning-creation, is necessarily given through discourse, regardless of whether that discourse is text or speech. But in giving this meaning of what the text is about (understanding the text in the mode of *Auslegung*) to myself, I also offer

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 16.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 28.

¹⁰²Ibid.

it freely to the others.¹⁰³ The freedom to create meaning is thus preserved for reader, author, and others. Therefore discourse, the text, is unstable—the text as *Auslegung* of its “subject matter,” as that emerges from the “point of view” occupied by the author and is expressed in that discourse which is the text, is offered to me as a reader, but I am free to re-interpret that very “subject matter” itself, to (re-)create “what is,” as Sartre would say, and so is the reader next to me, or after me. We are all, readers and authors, engaged in a world, we are all housed in language, but being so does not relieve us of the responsibility to dis-cover Being. As Heidegger insists, we are always within the hermeneutic circle. However, this is not a drawback to our existence; it is, rather, the structure of that very existence itself.

Sartre himself, it is true, explains a bit differently the responsibility of revelation for which I have been arguing.¹⁰⁴ Since creation of what is presupposes Being, and the for-itself “exists only as consciousness (of) being conscious of Being,” Being already is, whenever consciousness comes to be.¹⁰⁵ In other words, the for-itself requires Being for its own existence as (self)consciousness and for its being in general, and there is no “reciprocity” between Being and consciousness. The latter needs the former, but the former needs nothing besides itself, most especially including consciousness, the “for-itself.” Sartre takes this to mean that we have the responsibility of continuing to “make be” our revelations, our power of uncovering Being, for only we have the power of

¹⁰³Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁴While his explanation allows me to depict concisely the responsibility of the reader, I cannot agree with all the details of Sartre’s understanding of the dis-covery of beings/entities.

¹⁰⁵Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, 45.

maintaining these dis-coveries.¹⁰⁶ Otherwise, they would simply recede into the “night” of Being. We must clarify here that Sartre is not promoting some kind of conservatism or traditionalism; he is not claiming that we need to make the conscious choice to be responsible for (i.e., assert against all opposed readings) our interpretations of Being, but that it is part of our ontological constitution that we maintain these interpretations, for it is the only way they have “life,” so to speak. To put it another way, Being does not interpret itself, but simply is. Any discovery, any revelation, is done through consciousness, and so that revelation, as long as it exists, exists only as maintained by consciousness.¹⁰⁷ Even though the thesis of this dissertation rejects the notion of subjectivity this conception of responsibility seems to endorse, Sartre’s view rightly emphasizes that readers are responsible for their interpretations of the text. Such emphasis positively contributes to my own view that as long as interpretations (meaning-creations) exist, they exist through readers and by readers, the other half of the conversation, as it were; otherwise, interpretation would recede into the “night” of the text, and indeed there would be no text (no art, which requires both creators and preservers), for there would be no uncovering (no discourse) if we deny that Dasein is the disclosure of the truth of beings. The poiesis of beliefs then, built on the ground of the text, is as fragile as the reader herself, and is as transitory and ephemeral. The desire exhibited by that reader who asserts that her reading is valid for all in every time and

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Once more, we can see the limitation of conceiving of Dasein purely as subjectivity or consciousness as Sartre does here, for it seems improbable that interpretations could be maintained without a will to power, something Heidegger denies as authentic Dasein, if such notions of subjectivity are given primordial ontological importance.

space exhibits nothing more than a desire for her own immortality, or, to put it in Sartrean terms, the desire that the for-itself combine with the in-itself while maintaining its own personal consciousness, the very desire that causes Sartre to declare that human beings are a “useless passion.”¹⁰⁸

Sartre’s own notion of responsibility brings out an important aspect of my thesis, namely that although meaning-creation may result in our adherence to certain beliefs, to read in the hope of finding or confirming particular beliefs, or to read only by setting the artwork within a coherent and self-supporting system of beliefs (a worldview), is ultimately a refusal to hear the text authentically. It is to act in “bad faith” toward the text by fleeing our freedom and responsibility to create meaning. But Sartre, like Heidegger, attacks the notion of “measuring” Being according to a system of beliefs or values.¹⁰⁹ He

¹⁰⁸BN 784.

¹⁰⁹Kořakowski never questions viewing Being through the creation of values, but instead contemplates why we are compelled to express values at all. He claims that in “defining oneself in a given and experienced order of values” there is “a desire to step outside oneself into an order in which one treats oneself as an object with a designated sphere of possibilities, as a thing, as filling in a space in a structure which...is already complete” (19). He goes on to make the intriguing argument that there is a connection between forming values and having freedom, in that humans must first consider themselves to be “free absolutes” in order to set up a value system. He sees, as Heidegger does, that values have their genesis in “preconditions,” in the ultimate precondition, which is an idea of God. He also explicitly names Sartre as perpetuating a myth (not a “wrong” move in Kořakowski’s eyes) of understanding existence as “contingent,” that Being and Nothingness is as “mythical” as any modernist (he uses Leibniz as an example) philosophy of Being and things. He also criticizes the “rational organization” of society in that it removes individual responsibility and makes it the “object of professional interest,” such as is to be found in modern societies with their extensive and byzantine insurance systems—an individual’s life itself becomes the “professional interest” of the insurer, whose real goal is the smooth functioning of machine-like system. I would claim that this Orwellian present is what Heidegger has already warned us of, the obsession with calculation and “enframing,” the technologization of beings and Being. See Kořakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, 19, 57, 68, and 86. From a wholly different perspective, Iris Murdoch, through a celebration of literature, gives voice to the connection between language and values: “Words constitute the ultimate texture and stuff of our moral being...whereby we express ourselves into existence. We became spiritual animals when we became verbal animals. The *fundamental* distinctions can only be made in words. Words are spirit” (original italics). See Iris Murdoch, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1997), 241. Although I appreciate Murdoch’s love of literature, her words here seem to reduce language to a mere conduit of moral didacticism, and Heidegger

claims that the founding of values (especially moral values assumed to be right or good in every instance) is based on a mistaken notion of truth, namely the grounding of truth in contemplation, or the “passive reception” of Being.¹¹⁰ It is my impression that this is Sartre’s way of denying that Being interprets itself, dis-covers itself, as well as his condemnation of those who would deny their own responsibility in being a consciousness and therefore their own responsibility for interpreting existence. It seems clear that even if we choose to be passive and contemplate, we still interpret, i.e., we have the freedom to deny, to ignore, to flee, to be in bad faith. Sartre assures us that such a choice is an exceedingly dangerous one, that in waiting for Being to interpret itself, we turn toward that person whom we consider to be the spokesperson for Being, e.g., a religious leader, but as Sartre warns us, this may also be a despot, tyrant, or murderer, an annihilator of beings in the most “literal” sense.¹¹¹ To reduce reading to a mere search for timeless values, or to read only through a framework of beliefs, is to place the power of interpretation in the hands of another without question and without regard for the truth of beings or self, to follow a school of thought, a doctrine, a church, a censorship bureau. Such values and beliefs are dogmatic in their conceptualization, and to use them to interpret is to assert that meanings are not created, but found, that they exist a priori, that all knowledge and truth has already been encompassed and categorized as to its worth. The necessity of ignorance as a spur to action, that which leaves all the possibilities open

would have much to criticize in her unquestioned assumption that we are “moral agents.”

¹¹⁰Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, 56.

¹¹¹Ibid.

and structures the deep inexpressibility that grounds language, is denied by such systems of belief.¹¹² To read in order to find or affirm beliefs and via beliefs already held is not only to deny the text and its truth, it is to deny the great responsibility of the self, to silence ourselves as we silence others, to annihilate language and leave the world mute and soundless.

¹¹²Ibid., 69. I would also add here that such is the danger of reading ontotheologically or metaphysically, believing that “true” interpretation can be validated by, and perhaps reducible to, an eternal and immutable viewpoint that unlocks all codes and “embodies” all truth as “correct” thinking.

Chapter 4: The Interpretative Crisis and Belief: The Being of Reading

And these images, these reverberations,
And others, make certain how being
Includes death and the imagination.

Wallace Stevens, "Metaphor as Degeneration"

We have learned from Heidegger, Sartre, and Wittgenstein that *how* we read implies a certain philosophy of language, as well as notions of truth and knowledge. Although discussed briefly throughout the previous chapters, it remains to be seen how thinking differently about language reconceptualizes reading and the reader. This chapter is devoted to the question of the reader and how the founding of beliefs and meaning through reading is itself a poetic activity grounded in what is groundless. That is, the poiesis of meaning does not result from referring to an a priori, self-determining structure that sanctions one and only one interpretation. It is in and through discourse that we construct meaning, discourse that cannot be pre-determined or found meaningful prior to dialogue—a structure of language I have called the “grammar of the inexpressible.” Focusing on this structure while exploring the practice of reading should therefore allow us to avoid the following: thinking that a literary work of art’s meaning is the product of the reader’s will or an artifact within the text; thinking that the freedom of creativity necessary for both the poesis of art and the poesis of meaning demands that such freedom be limitless and exceed the boundaries of context; and, finally, thinking that

creative thinking itself is crippled by the seeming constraints of intersubjective communication.¹ In avoiding these pitfalls, I will instead propose that authentic reading is a practice that makes possible the poesis of a genuine self founded on an engagement with other persons.² Finally, I will try to show that insofar as interaction with or approaching another is definitive of what we call religion, reading reveals itself to be at heart a form of sacred and contemplative practice that constructs and deconstructs self, society, and truth.

It will become evident again in this chapter, as it did in the previous chapter, that I rely heavily on Heidegger's understanding of discourse and language as explained, for example, in *Being and Time* sections 34 and 35. As I understand it, texts are a form of

¹Charles Altieri claims that late twentieth-century literary theorists, by assuming a nihilistic stance in that the world had to be "negated" in order for the self as self to come into being, consider either the "will" or "linguistic acts" as "the source of the alienating powers of consciousness." Such theorists are faced either with the "dream" of fleeing from reflection and thereby destroying self-consciousness, or surrendering to "the free play of the intellectual" and thinking the world unknowable. See Charles Altieri, "Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory," *Modern Language Notes* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1399-1400. My own notion of reading attempts to avoid that type of thinking that forces the choice between will and language in the first place.

²One could say that I see in reading the potential for what Owen Barfield names "transpersonal consciousness," but I want to avoid here engaging the long history of either "personhood" or consciousness as those concepts are discussed in the cognitive sciences, psychology, etc. I also am fully aware that I am not the first to propose that reading is a transformative practice, as pointed out in the introduction. Other examples: Alberto Manguel believes that a reader is implicitly addressed by a text, and so every reader of a text becomes a character, to be made and/or discovered. See Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (New York: Viking, 1996), 314. Phillip Stambovsky believes that works of art form a "bridge" between individuals engaged in those works. See Phillip Stambovsky, *Philosophical Conceptualization and Literary Art: Inference, Ereignis, and Conceptual Attunement to the Work of Poetic Genius* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 20-21. On page 53, he cites Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, page 144 as support for the revelatory nature of works of art: "We do not learn who man is by learned definitions; we learn it only when man contends with the essent [seiend], striving to bring it into its being, i.e., to bring it into limit and form, that is to say...when he builds poetically." Finally, Stanley Cavell suggests a connection between using language and coming to know the self: "To imagine an expression (experience the meaning of a word) is to imagine it as giving expression to a soul." He goes on to claim that the self is interesting not because of its own uniqueness, but because there is something common to it that engages each of us. See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 355, 361.

discourse, a way of “talking about” something with one another. This means that the primary “actors” in the practice of reading are author and reader—in short, reading is a form of human communication (not a decoding of references, not a mere gathering of information) that, like all discourse, shares truth through disclosure and dis-covery.³ I will argue throughout this chapter that reading so understood is a form of communication, but communication grasped in a specifically Heideggerian way, as explained for example at *BT* 205: “Communication is never anything like a conveying of experiences...from the interior of one subject into the interior of another...In discourse, Being-with becomes ‘explicitly’ *shared*” (original italics).⁴ Any meaning we construct for the text takes its place in this sharing with another person or persons, and as such takes its orientation from the discourse with others. As the activity of discursive un-covering (truthfulness) is never complete, so any meaning we create for the text can also never be complete. Not only is the reader, as participant-communicant in the discourse, responsible for the meaning she imaginatively builds for the text, she is also responsible for hearing the discourse (reading

³*BT* 204-205.

⁴We can hear this sense of “communicate” in English, as long as we know how to listen to the Latin: *communicare* originally meant to “share” or “unite,” and also to “discuss together.” It did not simply denote a transferring of information, as is often the case today. Frank Schalow captures the power of communication this way: “If the embodied condition of my attunement is the capacity to hear, then it is by allowing this power to govern my correlative potential to speak that I can yield to the possibility of my communion with the other. Put simply, I speak only insofar as I can hear...and it is my ability to hear that first acclimates me to the other.” He goes on to say that the imagination lets us be this “ear,” to become a body. See Frank Schalow, “Imagination and Embodiment: The Task of Reincarnating the Self from a Heideggerian Perspective,” *International Studies in Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (2004): 172. This idea of communication allows Stephen Mulhall to claim that Heidegger “continues to think that it is of the essence of philosophical friendship to provoke one’s other to thought.” Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 291.

and rereading the text), for understanding that the task of meaning-creation and self-creation is never complete and never finished.⁵

Part I: Reading and the Dismantling of Values

Identity is love and difference is beauty.
Northrop Frye

Reading understood as an imaginative, never-completed or complete practice immediately calls into question a certain assumption about reading (and Being in general), namely that a text's meaning or interpretation depends on grasping a certain "worldview" concomitant with that view's inherent or explicit system of values. Once again, I am using the term "worldview" in an explicitly Heideggerian (and therefore negative) way. As discussed throughout this dissertation, a worldview is a theoretical perspective on all beings grounded in what Heidegger calls "metaphysics," such that all beings and Being itself are thought to be fully grasped and understood. This understanding is articulated precisely by calculating the value or usefulness of beings for consumption as the full measure of their being. For Heidegger, such thinking blinds us to potentials and possibilities, not only of other entities, but ourselves. In short, encompassing the world in a supposedly holistic perspective divorces us from world and brings thinking to an end, or more precisely, does not allow thinking to begin.

The image of reading I am evoking in this chapter is therefore neither systematic nor theoretical, i.e., it is not a method of interpretation but an understanding of reading

⁵Mulhall, in addition to claiming that reading is the "voice of conscience," says that "redemptive reading is thus the means by which the thinker acts as midwife to others and to herself, giving birth to the thinker that she and they are yet to become." I would add that being responsible for one's creation of meaning leads to this "redemptive" quality, an understanding of the writer who "gives expression to a recognizably human voice." Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, 280, 315-16.

itself as an interpretation of Being. As such, reading is an understanding interpretation (Heidegger's *auslegen*) of a mode of discourse and the communicants in that discourse who of course bring to it personal experiences, assumptions, and beliefs in their attempt to construct meaning from the text. Where a particular interpretative method or theory (e.g. Freudian psychoanalysis) may attempt to answer why a particular reader or writer arrives at a particular meaning for the text, the ground that makes possible such an interpretation remains untouched and all but presumed by the theory. The discourse that is text may set forth the conditions for certain moral codes or ethical doctrines (this becomes apparent in the reading of sacred texts), but is not somehow a representation of or reducible to those beliefs explicitly endorsed by the text. Just as the being of the there (Dasein) makes possible the adoption of a worldview but is not thereby a worldview somehow embodied, reading is a practice that allows for the possibility of creation of a self (an authentic self if the reading is a genuine hearing of another), and so such a practice is ontologically prior to the adoption of any propositional beliefs or the conversion to the system of thought exhorted by the text. This priority is precisely why the question of whether a text is fiction or non-fiction is something of a non-starter for understanding the reading process and the truth it uncovers, for gathered under the heading "non-fiction" is a "definition" of truth and Being that already excludes all texts considered fiction from being truthful by delimiting reality, actuality, etc. Reading as a revelatory and transforming practice, however, is not hampered by any notion of truth defined as accuracy of representation, "presence," or correctness in identifying the correspondence between words and referents.

As described in chapter 2, an initial approach to a different conception of language and consequently reading can be had through Wittgenstein. Central to Wittgenstein's work *On Certainty* (hereafter *OC*) is the argument that in any language game, certain "propositions," groundless in that game, are foundational to it and create the framework on which surety within that language game is based. Unlike scientific data, which is empirically grounded and can be used to verify or disprove theories, meanings of words are grounded in contexts within the language game, not on an accurate picture of events, the theory of the *Tractatus* that Wittgenstein later denies. In his later work, Wittgenstein concludes that it is only from within the architecture of the language game that one learns what unambiguous empirical evidence is, but language itself is not a "piece" of this verifiable evidence. We can thus reject with Wittgenstein the descriptive theory of language, as well as the positivist argument that the nature of language, its ideal purpose, is to make the physical world transparent to human thinking, in other words, to be scientifically sound, a goal the positivists thought language in its "natural" state failed to meet. Instead, language encompasses a "form of life" and a way of talking about said form. Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein does not intend to deny the correctness of scientific data, to label it a fraud or a deception, but only to demonstrate that language is not exhausted by its scientific function (i.e. correctness and accuracy) and that any proscription of a concept of language that does not exalt the scientific function is harmful to our understanding of meaning.

But even though Wittgenstein may free us from the misconception that language is or should be scientific in nature, it seems that one possible way to interpret his

conclusions is to claim that every language game outlines what it will consider real, and therefore readers in every language game will still have a standard for fiction and non-fiction, will still create meaning for texts in particular based on beliefs coordinated with what is considered “real” or “unreal” (the ontological question has been answered, in other words, and in such a way that the useful category of “fiction” as “non-historical narrative” no longer can be considered truth, but is now some type of, perhaps helpful, lie). Wittgenstein’s thinking alone does not insulate us from aligning the so-called “inherent” value in things, their amount of reality as it were, with the use (and therefore meanings) of words. What is most needed for understanding reading as transformative practice is overcoming any notion of the real that assumes only non-fiction texts to be truthful, finding truth instead through the free creativity that is so often at play within what is normally considered fiction or myth, even when such creative narratives have no basis in readers’ historical situations (where “history” signifies only events segmented by time according to the everyday notion of reality), nor in what amounts to the sum total of their experiences (where “experience” is preferentially defined as observable situations of agents interacting with objects). The assumption that history and experience are mere occurrences mapped by discrete selves entails the very conception of truth and therefore reality that I presume Heidegger is critiquing.⁶ As I understand it, creative meaning-

⁶Leszek Kołakowski also calls into question the equivalence of experience and values, and therefore the concept of an idealized subject with transparent knowledge of itself: “We talk of experience as if it were formless clay from which we form molds at will; but we are unable to explain how it is that, while still nonexistent, “I” should mold myself out of this clay.” Leszek Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 64.

making through reading, keeping the question of Being and Dasein open and therefore able to be heard, gives the lie to these particular concepts of time, experience, and self.⁷

The most important demand for reconceptualizing reading, then, is overcoming a way of thinking that equates truth with the “real” and therefore useful, that perceives Being (and therefore world, self, language, etc.) only via a system of propositional beliefs or definitions of the real. As Heidegger points out toward the end of “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” it is this equation that defines our modern (or postmodern) condition.⁸ Hidden within that doctrine that claims truth to be correctness is the relation of a subject toward objects, and how that subject should determine the value of those objects. From this perspective, it is assumed that the “normal” act of reading overlays the text with a

⁷The particular concepts referred to here all assume that the self is purely autonomous but isolated, thereby simultaneously granting the self limitless power to define all other things in relation to itself and reducing it to a pinpoint of supposedly stable qualities. The notion at play in this dissertation is self as a continuum in flux through its interconnection with all other entities.

⁸Heidegger’s insight into this condition is astounding. Such a tendency toward formulating and validating worldviews lies at the heart of structuralist and communitarian theories (that a person understands language, nature, experience, etc. only via the “code” granted her by her sociocultural environment), as well as analytic theories of the person (e.g., propositions and actions entail an explicit or implicit belief or system of beliefs). Jan Mukarovsky embraced such ideas when he claimed that poetry’s goal is “suprapersonal and lasting values.” Jan Mukarovsky, “On Poetic Language,” in *Word and Verbal Art: Selected Essays of Jan Mukarovsky*, ed. John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 2. I will discuss later in this chapter how poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories also do not fulfill Heidegger’s concept of authentic self and interpretation, even though such theories deny the validity of the Cartesian ego and any stable or self-stabilizing center of meaning (as culture itself was for the structuralists). Briefly put, these theories still assume that language is nothing more than a system of signs, and meaning nothing more than interpreting those signs. Language and texts are considered representational and bound to ideology. There is no notion of the dis-covery of beings, of truth, and the Kantian precept of being unable to reach the “thing in itself” seems to go unquestioned. The total valorization of signs does not simply negate the Cartesian ego, but any notion of self, including Dasein. As Altieri points out, the early Derrida is absolutely correct in denying a “substantive” idea of self, but he is “too quick” to deny any possibility of identity. Altieri goes on to claim literature can “expand” the self, that it gives us “an awareness of the communal roles and modes of activity we share with others.” Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory,” 1404-5. Without the unhiddenness that Dasein/discourse makes possible, there is no revelation of truth, no chance of understanding Being and forming an authentic self.

hierarchical system of beliefs determining the real and the unreal, and that the reader understands herself to be at a distance from the text in order to impute those beliefs to the text. I call into question this idea of distance between reader and text, that readers are somehow “automatically” attuned to genre identification and the possible “messages” the text desires to convey. Although assuming such a structure of propositional beliefs necessitates this distance and idea of encoding, to claim such activity (reader→beliefs→text→meaning) is the nature of reading is no different from claiming, for it entails such, that the nature of language is the transference of information, an idea we have seen undermined in chapters 2 and 3. My understanding of language based on and inspired by Wittgenstein’s and Heidegger’s claims suggests that reading creates that very possibility (mistaken as it may be) wherein we can take up distance from the text and examine a “piece” of literature as if it were an isolated object bearing determinable properties; however, reading is not itself this distancing, but first of all a bringing near.⁹

The concept of language outlined in the two previous chapters implies that reading is much more complex than the situation of an active or passive reader facing a text, determining its “message” (the “active” reader), or having her own beliefs (understood as propositional content, codes, etc.) determined by the text (the “passive”

⁹David Jasper cites Maurice Blanchot’s concept of the “tale”: “If we regard the tale [le récit] as the true telling of an exceptional event which has taken place and which someone is trying to report, then we have not come close to sensing the true nature of the tale. The tale is not the narration of an event, but the event itself, the approach to that event, the place where that event is made to happen—an event which is yet to come and through whose power of attraction the tale can hope to come into being too.” Jasper continues by saying that we “read only by extending in ourselves the very existence of the text.” David Jasper, *The Sacred Desert: Religion, Literature, Art, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 29. Although I shy away from the language of existence Jasper uses here, I appreciate and echo Blanchot’s notion of narrative not being descriptive, but the actual bringing of the reader to its “event.”

reader), the meaning of the text being somehow created from an interplay of belief statements or ideologies conferred by signs. The activity of reading cannot simply be reduced to the conscious (or even un- or subconscious) application of a “worldview” to the text, nor to an interaction of “worldviews” determining each other; reading is not itself this theory-building activity, but can become the background for it. To assume that reading requires a worldview in order to accomplish its task is to make a mistake analogous to what Heidegger describes in “The Age of the World Picture,” namely that to think Being or beings are first and foremost systematically defined by a worldview is a refusal to understand Being, leading to the assumption of a worldview as the basis of Being. Inauthentic reading is, therefore, that type of reading whereby we do attempt to identify a system of beliefs or moral values within the text as a precondition and basis for any meaning the text may have, ultimately reducing the text to summary, precis, paraphrase, or the like, an outline of the beliefs we think the text is supporting. We look for themes, meanings, and messages by, for example, consciously inhabiting the text as narrator or protagonist, wondering if we would commit the same actions in similar circumstances, or operating in the mode of a spectator, passing judgment on events described by the text. Many texts, especially those considered fiction, invite us to imaginatively inhabit the text in precisely this way, and indeed much of the “joy” of reading is in imagining ourselves while reading as silent characters within the text. Although the intimacy between the visual imagination and narrative can lull us into believing that the text means only what we represent to ourselves, a private theater within

the reader's mind, such effortless visualization is not the sole purpose of reading even if it often is the central characteristic of such activity.

As discussed in chapter 3, reading is primarily an engagement with another person or persons and always remains this mode of discourse, even if not explicitly acknowledged or even when denied as a result of inauthentic reading (such reading in the mode of what Heidegger calls the "They-self" leads to the silencing of others at the cost of an imputation of our own beliefs). Considering the text to be discourse therefore always belies the notion of a stable, atemporal reader or self and instead reveals the self to be in the mode of becoming, an activity of self-poiesis that draws its energy from the very discourse with which it is engaged. Inauthentic or message-oriented reading, therefore, is the reaction of the reader to this loss of (they-)self, the "Brahmanic annihilation"¹⁰ of being caught by another's thoughts, words, images, in short, being caught up in another such that the reader's self loses its accustomed boundedness. Authentic meaning-creation is also a poiesis of belief, but belief now considered more organically as an evolving process with the possibility to critique itself, a reintegration of the reader that is now based in Being-with. If forming meaning as poetic activity remains inauthentic, if one can only interpret the text by reducing it to propositions considered both binding and timeless, the self simply retains its contours of the they-self by imputing ethical/moral values to or imposing beliefs on the text as that text's meaning, ultimately either

¹⁰I adopt this phrase once more from Williams and Kirkpatrick's introduction to *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill and Wang, 1991), 25. As I make clear in the conclusion, I do indeed think approaching the Nothing and inhabiting that liminal space is part of what discourse does, and a fortiori, part of what occurs during reading.

confirming or denying that the text is an extension of self, culture, experience, etc. If the practice of reading is an understanding interpretation of Being and world, a different self is founded, but one that now recognizes this new self's ephemerality in that the self is understood as becoming and not as a static subject. The seemingly vivid borders of our certainty become blurred, and our words learn new meanings through the new uses another (the author) puts them to—we learn to express what was before inexpressible for us, or put another way, meaning finds its source in what was meaningless.

But to start and end one's reading practice in what I have been calling the inauthentic mode (which Heidegger would argue is our first or "everyday" mode of encountering a text) means the text has been kept mute, and in this avoidance of discourse the reader cannot call herself into question, and the opportunity to become a self remains distant.¹¹ The true "clearing" of the self that reading promises, however, requires an attunement to what the text is about and grasping that the poiesis of meaning arises through the language of another in this turning toward what the text is about. The poiesis of meaning is a self-understanding, or perhaps more precisely, an understanding of self. But as Wittgenstein demonstrates through, for example, the "private language argument," or Heidegger through the concept of Being-with, or Sartre through his assertion that self is determined via the Other, the authentic self is always becoming, always arising in a world, and does not somehow come to the world pre-defined and established as a unity.

¹¹Mulhall claims that the voice of a "genuine other" is the "voice of conscience" in that it removes the self's "anonymity" and assures it it is not "self-identical." This is a form of awakening, and my existence becomes for me something "uncanny," no longer something assumed, which assumption Mulhall links with the they-self. See Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, 278.

The self is understood only in conjunction with others, as Being is understood only in conjunction with time or Nothing. This way of conceiving the self means there is always already communication, not a duality of isolated entities (self-other, Being-world) fully knowledgeable of themselves who must now learn to pass information to one another and coordinate themselves. Such an ontological condition means that as beings we are always already within discourse, within poiesis, and such artistry of self-understanding can never come to finality or completion. For the authentic self, the text cannot be used to found an unchanging bedrock of propositional beliefs. Reading makes possible a humility that demands we take responsibility for whatever meaning we do in fact create, acknowledging that this imaginative and poetic activity remain unfinished. This heightened sense of our own becoming made possible by the authentic practice of reading is a recognition of angst as Heidegger understands it—not fear, not everyday anxiety, but an exaltation of becoming that defies complacency and the stagnancy purchased through the mistaken assumption that one knows oneself to be distinctly knowable even if the world is in flux.

It is important to note, however, that the language game itself creates the condition that makes possible worldviews and mythologies of divine laws and timeless codes of conduct.¹² For instance, a people through their language exhibit a form of life, and in using names reflect what is important to that life (in short, a generic notion of

¹²This is Crary's thesis in *Beyond Moral Judgement*, namely that reading literature is a moral education via imaginative engagement with a narrative. This can be achieved because the learning of language means the simultaneous acquisition of emotions, habits, etc. Kołakowski makes a similar claim in that values give rise to myths and science, in that all human life is a projection of human desires and needs. See, for example, Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, 25: "Myths that teach us that something simply is good or evil cannot be avoided if humanity is to survive."

“values,” things considered worthy for some end or other, though such valuing does not necessarily bespeak a systemic worldview). We can think of such naming as a limiting or boundary-setting, but as Heidegger urges us to, i.e., not an ending or definition but a place from which to begin and be in awe of something as a being, as existing.¹³ In this form of naming, one first secures the thing itself, not a representation or sign of it. We can begin to see here the fascination with etymology exhibited by Barfield, for instance, who claimed that etymology gives us the key to the evolution of human consciousness.¹⁴ Though Barfield never seemed to question the modern concept of consciousness, there is no doubt that etymology gives us the history of thinking, how a form of life first engaged (and hence interpreted, named) its world (and why the Stoics named such a history “etymology,” the etymological roots of which are “true” and “speech”). In such naming, there is no need for accurate description of a pre-ordained object, even if the word comes to be itself a term of description or its own genesis forgotten. Truth defined as accurate description and the correctness of assertions is an imposition on the essence of language and a latecomer to the game itself, for all language is “in the truth,” to use Heidegger’s terms, in the sense that it is a revelation of Being and beings. Creativity is both a working with, and a reaction against, this naming process, which on reflection can give the impression that timeless beliefs of what is real or genuine are at work in language.

¹³Cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, ed. John Sallis, trans. Reginald Lilly, *Studies in Continental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 72.

¹⁴The premise of his *History in English Words*.

But although the “nature” of discourse is not equivalent to a passing of information between subjects, or even between subjects and objects, when we construct a meaning for the text, given the situatedness of Dasein, that meaning feels inherent to the text, as if it were a quality or property “inside” it. Our interpretations of texts are consciously groped for, they are extensions of our free creativity of the self via the imagination, and so they portray themselves as valuable, as something important and real, for interpretative activity is a very construction of self (again, irrespective of whether that self remains in the they or comes into its own). The most important task for the reader, then, is authentic reading, to ensure that Dasein recognize its revelatory nature, that it is a “shepherd of Being” as Heidegger claims. Inauthentic reading, however, gives the illusion that all the text’s meaning has been exhausted and completed by the reader herself, that the one or at least most important and conclusive interpretation has been found. Regardless of its type, all poesis of meaning is that feeling of being able to continue reading a text, what Wittgenstein might call being able to go on, that which allows a reader to reflect and say “I know what this text means,” even though the epistemological relation to the text is not primary.

But it is nonetheless an illusion or perhaps a delusion to think that one has fully comprehended the text and incorporated it into the self. This way of understanding reading only leaves the text digested, dead, and silent but for the echoes of the reader. The way of understanding reading I am attempting here is not a method so much as a clarification, the reading process considered a revelation that allows us to see that every

meaning we build can be rearranged, added to, demolished, reinvented, reimagined.¹⁵ It is an awareness of self that denies the self to be a subject, but still affirms a self. The reconceptualization of reading I am arguing for is to see reading as that sharing in language between reader and writer that first of all permits and underlies our ability to say “this text means such and such.” In rethinking meaning-creation, it is a misconception to think that language and text either inhibit meaning by being “vague” or effortlessly reveal meaning by themselves, as it is a misconception to think that the reader reveals meaning without due regard to the text or inhibits it because of her inherent conceptual limitations. These reflections on reading and meaning (reader-based and text-based) masquerade as the poetic process and condemn the text to the meaning at which they arrive.

Even though as readers we respond to the text with our own poetic creation of meaning, for the text to remain alive means that it must be reread and re-reflected, that we must constantly call into question this self that we find everywhere, a self analogous to

¹⁵In this sense, Derrida’s notion of deconstruction, its epistemological skepticism and notion of the “trace,” is a vastly important step forward for understanding texts and one that so obviously reinvigorated literary theory. I consider his critical understanding of the sign to be both enlightening and devastating, taking the interpretation of signs to its absolute conclusion. However, as I have argued in chapters two and three, language, discourse, and text do not have the ontological status of being a system of signs, words standing for or representing something else. As I understand it, anything can be turned into a sign, but nothing is “by nature” a sign (see Francis F. Seeburger, *The Stream of Thought* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1984] volume 1 for an extended discussion of this argument). Both deconstructionists and structuralists seem to take for granted that language is a system of signs, that is, its ontological status is that of a sign system or symbolic code. It is because of this latter assumption that I reject deconstructionist theories as appropriate for understanding the nature of discourse and texts, though I find much of value in the practice of deconstruction. The literary work of art is not somehow a collection of signs that is itself made to be yet another sign, but another’s discourse that also imagines and helps discover the reader. Finally, as Michael Happy suggests, the unquestioned assumption of poststructuralism (and I would add structuralism and semiosis, and any other theory of language that claims language is ontologically a sign system, a system of metaphors representing or alluding to referents) is that language must become a “vehicle” for ideologies—language becomes a “carrier” for representations, the very thing Wittgenstein goes to such great lengths to show to be nonsense. See Michael Happy, “The Reality of the Created: From Deconstruction to Recreation,” in *Frye and the Word: Religious Contexts in the Writings of Northrop Frye*, ed. Jeffery Donaldson and Alan Mendelson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 84-5.

Heidegger's "indifferent" I.¹⁶ It too lies forgotten in the text, and it cannot be avoided; we will say of every text read that we have indeed read it, which means more than that our eyes have passed over print, but that we have come to an understanding of the text, very often to the point where we do not feel the necessity of rereading. Our understanding of a text, and indeed our own poiesis, is inevitable, we cannot help but in reading reflect on the meaning of the text before us. But what I have been trying to bring to light throughout this dissertation is that, by questioning our assumptions of language and self, by destabilizing what passes as truth and objectivity in language, every reading depends on another's language, a discourse that remains human in that every human is a passageway into error, a constant concealing and bringing out of hiding. As Heidegger emphasizes, the passage to the authentic self is never complete, is not a rung to be reached on a metaphysical hierarchy, and we always remain susceptible to returning to the mode of the they-self. The poiesis of beliefs through reading is in the end perfectly dependent on another's language whose meaning cannot be predetermined, and it is a way of responding to the pressure of having come to the boundary of the altogether inexpressible—not the indescribable—for this discourse must first be heard, and in that

¹⁶See Martin Heidegger, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, ed. John Sallis, trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *Studies in Continental Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 11-12. Here Heidegger uses a notion of mood to exemplify difference. A different mood means a different content that the I experiences. "I become conscious of the diversity of experiences only in the experienced content. Thus, the manner of participation within and of being taken along by the world of the 'I' is an indifferent one; indeed, it is so indifferent that it engages everything, and accomplishes all its tasks without hesitation." Here I am arguing that reading ultimately holds out to us the possibility of questioning this I that simply plunges into everything, including texts. Later on in this passage, Heidegger will bring up the notion of values connected with the indifferent I. I think our first approach to a text is through this indifference, through mood, through value, but even here, reading destabilizes this particular I. We can avoid the power of reading by reasserting this I, or we can listen to the text, fully turn our attention to it as reading demands. If we do this, the self becomes dynamic and we open ourselves to the truth of things.

hearing another person is implicated as the giver of language. We cannot “express” it because it is not our own, it is not a thing we can possess via representation or any other means. We can of course force a meaning onto another’s language, that which by its nature does not find its source in our intentions, only at the cost of closing ourselves off from hearing it. But if we are sensitive to such language and realize the depth to which we share language and world with others, we find that our own act of meaning-creation is truly inspired, is free, for being free does not mean the imposition of my will onto language, but being free to listen, being free to recognize that another self has a voice that I must heed. It is the human voice (which is the text) that inspires me, and so in reading authentically we come to discover our own creative and original activity. In coming to see that authentic reading grounds the possibility of the authentic poiesis of meaning, we transcend not objects in a world of discrete existences, but a self, and thereby come to a world.¹⁷

Yet inauthentic meanings are still poetic in themselves, in that they too outline a grammar of the self-as-subject, a self that reduces the text to an object whose meaning amounts to a calculation of its worth for that subject. Such readings are indeed in part the product of an individual’s beliefs, expectations, and desires, all of which both limits them and forms the basis for an engagement with others. One can of course remain in this practice and feel free, for example, to psychoanalyze authors (and their texts) on a Freudian level. But there is an additional cost readers must pay for this kind of reading:

¹⁷As discussed in chapter 3, but for one instance of Heidegger’s own argument, see “On the Essence of Ground,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 108-109.

the notion of rightness or wrongness, moral or ethical, is claimed by the reader either on behalf of or against the text. The text must either be defied or be seen as putative evidence for the reader's value system (worldview), and both options can be "proven" by, for example, a further claim to authorial intent, a hermeneutic strategy that enfoldes an idea of correctness, namely that authorial intent represents the "true," "real," and correct meaning of the text.¹⁸ Even if one can easily refute the claim that the task of interpretation is to identify the author's intent, and just as easily demonstrate that a reader's interpretation has very little to do with that intent, the fact remains that the poiesis of belief about what the text means is written through the syntax of a constructed self, a self that would not have been possible without another's language. Even inauthentic readings are leaps from the ground of the text, conforming to a *decision*¹⁹ to read the text in a certain way from the *desire* to found a self (that ultimately must be constantly called into question if reading is to remain genuine). The self is never a thing or worldview in stasis, but constructed through a transcendence originating with another (with whom it communicates in a world), irrespective of whether or not this transcendence, otherness, or construction is explicitly acknowledged.

¹⁸Here is a good example of how the subject-object distinction analyzes how meaning arises in the text. The subject-reader's value system is the "hermeneutic" by which the text is read, but the responsibility for the meaning of the text is placed on the text itself, in this case the author. Either the author supports or defies the reader-subject's values, and this support or denial is the whole meaning of the text, the value system itself becoming in a sense invisible to the subject-reader, while meaning seemingly arises on its own through the text which is itself now reduced to a mere mirror of the author's mind.

¹⁹By this I do not mean a considered choice of options. I mean rather that the orientation toward subject-object thinking and the "doctrine" of truth it includes is an orientation that we can become aware of and criticize, as Heidegger does. Reading and language constantly call to us to become aware of this mode of being that we are in, yet we can still turn a deaf ear to them. This turning away, as much as our turning toward, remains our responsibility and not an accident, and this insistence on turning away from the text compels me to call it a decision.

Readers whose poesis of meaning results in only inauthentic interpretations, although such interpretations do not fall into the realm of verification, often attempt to substantiate them by pointing to certain words, sentences, or paragraphs as if the text were transparent and self-interpretable, founding whatever beliefs they hold by its own agency, as it were. The text itself, however, is a world of people, emotions, geography, and decisions, and whatever meaning we assign to the text after “experiencing” its world is based in that world but is not determined by it. We do not escape the responsibility of freedom when we read—the imagination remains an integral part of both the poesis of meaning and self. It is evident that a clearer understanding of both how reading focuses the imagination and how imagination contributes to our forms of life is necessary.

Part II: Imagination, Text, and the Poesis of the Self

[Imagination] enables us to live our own lives. We have it because we do not have enough without it.

Wallace Stevens

[A] man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Let us ask now, not “Can there be such a thing?” but “What do we imagine?” So give free rein to your imagination.

Wittgenstein

The concept of the imagination has had its own evolution, invoked by such radically different philosophers as Aristotle, Augustine, Hume, and Sartre.²⁰ Paralleling

²⁰Histories and theories of the imagination can and do fill whole volumes. The following citations are meant to give only a flavor of the astonishing variety of views and opinions of what the imagination is and how it functions, some of which are more amenable to my own notion of imagination, others which serve here as alternative and contrary views. Kirsteen Anderson claims, somewhat inimically and unfairly, that imagination has been “usurped” by ideology and that “imagination, unlike ideology, implies participant subjectivities: the subject defines itself in relation to an/the other” (51). See Kirsteen H. R. Anderson,

"Imagination and Ideology: Ethical Tensions in Twentieth-Century French Writing," *The Modern Language Review* 96, no. 1 (2001): 48, 51-2. Barfield subscribes to a Kantian version of the imagination as the synthesizer of "unrelated percepts" into objects. He claims, refreshingly, that "those...who are driven by an impulse to reduce the specifically human to a mechanical or animal regularity, will continue to be increasingly irritated by the nature of the mother tongue and make it their point of attack...Language is the storehouse of the imagination" (23). See also Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 23, 27-8. Garrett Green discusses the history of imagination in philosophy as a conflict between mimesis (what he calls the "mirror") and creativity (the "lamp"). His own theory is to make the imagination a lens that focuses its light and is "normative," a giver of meaning. See Garrett Green, "The Mirror, the Lamp, and the Lens: On the Limits of Imagination," *Ars Disputandi* 2 (2002): 76-79. Charles Laughlin and Jason Throop take the materialist view that the imagination evolved along with the brain and execrate postmodern theories for denying truth. Their version of the creative imagination is "the exercise of the creative intuitive faculties associated with imagery by which the essentially invisible aspects of reality may be envisioned" (713). Meaning for these authors is separated from truth, and the imagination's purpose is survival. See Charles D. Laughlin and C. Jason Throop, "Imagination and Reality: On the Relations between Myth, Consciousness, and the Quantum Sea," *Zygon* 36, no. 4 (2001): 710, 713-14, 720-1. Kathleen Lennon contends that imagination "constitutes" objects and is therefore the basis of what is real. She makes a kind of Kantian assumption that the imagination imposes order on a chaos of "perceptibles." However, her concept of imagination as functioning to make living possible seems to smack of utilitarianism, e.g., "a world can only be a world for us by means of the operation of the imagination" (120). See Kathleen Lennon, "Imaginary Bodies and Worlds," *Inquiry* 47, no. 2 (2004): 107-109, 120-1. Mark Muldoon claims that we still do not know what the imagination is, but only what "imagery, imagining, imagistic thought, fantasy, and the imaginary" are (73). Muldoon does not think theories of the former explain the power of creativity, and that "reading and interpretation are but particular manifestations of imagination" (74). Muldoon goes on to make what I find to be disastrous assumptions about imagination being a "method" for uncovering meaning. See Mark S. Muldoon, "Reading, Imagination, and Interpretation: A Ricoeurian Response," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2000): 73-76. Paul Ricoeur asserts that what he calls the "quasi-verbal" imagination (making syntheses while knowing such syntheses are a combination of "incongruencies") is the basis of the "quasi-optic" imagination. He claims that imagination "projects," is the "epoche." See Paul Ricoeur, "The Metaphoric Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978): 148-150, 154. Elaine Scarry takes a traditional analytic view, claiming that imagining is a "mental act" of "perceptual mimesis" under the "instruction" of an author. As such, we should all read great literature to be guided by greater imaginations than our own, imaginations which follow rules of operation. Literature for her, however, remains "counterfactual." See Elaine Scarry, "On Vivacity: The Difference between Daydreaming and Imagining-under-Authorial-Instruction," *Representations* 52 (1995): 3, 9, 11, and 21. Beata Stawarska begins her investigation of imagination from a Sartrean perspective, ultimately claiming that fiction does not follow a "picture theory" (reproductive) of imagination, but that fiction "produces," not merely reproduces, images. See Beata Stawarska, "Pictorial Representation or Subjective Scenario? Sartre on Imagination," *Sartre Studies International: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Existentialism and Contemporary Culture* 7, no. 2 (2001): 97-98. Philipp Stoellger takes the typical line that imagination "completes" perception and is a "cultural technique" of working with signs. See Philipp Stoellger, "Imagination Ltd.: Considerations on the Quest for Limits of Imagination," *Ars Disputandi* 2 (2002): 87-8, 96. Schalow contends that the imagination is caused by our being "embodied" and has a "linguistic root which spawns new patterns of meaning" (162). It is not a "discrete structure" but is part of being-in-the-world, a way of making new "boundaries." This Heideggerian perspective is probably the closest to my own view of imagination. See Schalow, "Imagination and Embodiment: The Task of Reincarnating the Self from a Heideggerian Perspective," 162-3, 165. Nathan Scott Jr. claims that structuralism ended the idea of imagination as the property of a "distinct reader" engaging her text. He goes on to assert that imagination is the "primary" form of thinking, with four distinct modes: seeing an entity as an entity, synthesizing, creating new concepts or "distancing," and seeing

changes in the philosophy of the imagination are revolutions in literature, and it is reasonable to conclude that the German and British Romantic movements apotheosized the imagination, giving it the aura of mystique and power it has today. For ancient and medieval thinkers, the imagination was nothing more than the human method of representing things that either were absent or non-existent. Its only function was to picture things, to mimic visual perception by supplying the mind with an *imago* that it could “see.” For Aristotle, the image became an integral part of his theory of the soul/mind, allowing for the transfer of the genus/form of the subject from one person to another and thereby securing linguistic communication,²¹ while Platonic and platonizing philosophers, including Augustine, considered the image and the faculty of the imagination to be a somewhat deceptive entity, at best barely approximating the real.²² The reason for this is largely due to the correlation between imagination and seeing, the early metaphysical tradition’s habit of treating the imagination as another faculty of visual perception, one step removed as it were. Since Platonic philosophy regarded human

one thing as a universal. One gets the feeling he is trying to include every notion of the imagination under one heading. For him, “the necessary *praeparatio* for the constitution of *fundamental* belief is formed by a venturesome step forward by the imagination into that which is before us” (13, original italics). See Nathan A. Scott, Jr., *The Poetics of Belief: Studies in Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, Santayana, Stevens, and Heidegger* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 4, 8, 13. Finally, Wallace Stevens gives us this poet’s view of the imagination: the imagination makes the world “no longer an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects, but an image. In the last analysis, it is with this image of the world that we are vitally concerned” Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1951), 151. What could have been a tired Kantian notion of the synthetic imagination turns somewhat Heideggerian with the added concept of concern.

²¹*De Anima* 429a10-20, 431a10-b10.

²²For example, the illustration of the “divided line” (itself an image!) in *Republic* 6.509-511 places images at the bottom of the hierarchy, distant from truth in their vagueness. To be fair, the images at the bottom of the hierarchy are more akin to reflections, like the image of a tree in a pool of water. Plato allows for mental images that are closer to the Forms, but the point here is that images for Plato, no matter how useful, are ontologically suspect.

sensory apparatus as no source of “true” knowledge and largely corrupted, the imagination was in no way better and mimicked the faults visual perception already possessed.²³

The idea that the imagination was another organ of perception did not change with the Romantic movement. Indeed, Coleridge famously declared it to be just that.²⁴ The Romantics, however, believed that the imagination was superior to the other sensory organs, and was indeed responsible for synthesizing the material world into a cohesive whole. The greater one’s imagination, the greater one’s understanding of the whole.²⁵ In addition, the Romantics believed that one could learn from the image in the imagination.

²³Patrick Mooney confirms such a view by never questioning that art is a form of mimesis, and that Plato’s expulsion of poets and poetry from the Republic is due to poetry’s imitating “the *wrong objects altogether*” (195, original italics). Ultimately, poets “fail to grasp the nature of reality” (198). See Patrick Mooney, “Republic X: What’s Wrong with Being a ‘Third Remove from the Truth?’” in *Desire, Identity, and Existence: Essays in Honor of T. M. Penner*, ed. Naomi Reshotko (Kelowna, BC, Canada: Academic Printing and Publishing, 2003), 195-6, 198, and 204.

²⁴J. Robert Barth points out that Coleridge melded the literary and the religious imaginations by his claim that thinking about literature involved creating and comprehending symbols. Barth cites Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* I.304: “The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will.” See J. Robert Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the Religious Imagination* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 124.

²⁵Edward Casey takes the Romantic view to task, calling such praise “an orgy of overestimation” (1). He instead wants to investigate the imagination as if it were an object of science, to bound it so it can be “properly defined and conceptualized.” He concludes that the imagination is “autonomous,” not simply a kind of feeling or perception, and that art “transports” us by activating this “special ability” of the imagination. See Edward S. Casey, *Imagining: A Phenomenological Study*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 1, 4, 17-18, and 207. John Coulson, on the other hand, is something of a neo-Romantic, claiming that imagination makes belief a possibility, that it “does more than suspend our disbelief. It predisposes us to believe in what it has realized” (7). Perception is “enlarged,” and literature (“literary achievement” as Coulson calls it) becomes “expressive of values which, although related to and uniquely expressible in literature, are also expressible ethically—in a manner or style of life” (8). One is unsure of the force of the “although”—it seems that art imitates life, but in such a way that life cannot “express” itself the same way as art, yet expresses the “same” thing. Why not do away with the art and simply live? See John Coulson, *Religion and Imagination: ‘in Aid of a Grammar of Assent’* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 5-8.

The imagined object could be “examined,” and again, the better one imagined something, the more one could learn from it. The imagination, instead of simply being the faculty whereby the external world could be represented, had become a source of creation, a way of inventing the world. It is this notion of creativity, of originality, that has been passed down to the present day, and that equates imagination with “source of creativity” or “originality,” not specifically with the invention of images for contemplation or enjoyment.

The above summary is necessary in order to clarify my own use of the word “imagination,” as outlined in the introduction. Although I do occasionally use it to mean “mental visualization” or “the crafting of an image,” I most often intend it to mean the source of our creativity, our ability to invent new ends and new possibilities, to “see” a path that is not immediately present to us. None of these of course require an actual mental visualization (although visualization may play a major role in the bulk of the cases), and there are a great many who have prodigious imaginations but whose mental images themselves may be nothing more than mere sketches or caricatures. The imagination, in this sense, can be virtually synonymous with how Sartre views consciousness, that ability to nihilate the present and “choose” the value by which we live and make decisions, to desire a different end from what is immediately before us.²⁶

²⁶As an alternative view to that which posits imagination as an almost “purely” mental activity, James Steeves points out Merleau-Ponty’s contribution to theories of the imagination in his claim that the body is both product and “instrument” of the imagination. Steeves says that “the phenomenal body involves a dialectic between habitual behavior and what Merleau-Ponty calls the virtual body, the ability to imagine alternative perspectives and modes of embodiment and to use that ability to develop habits into symbolic activity” (370). In this way, the imagination is “essential” for being in the world and opens beings to us by “neutralizing” metaphysical assumptions, namely that meaning is not the result “percepts and images” becoming “mental contents that are synthesized by consciousness” (372). See James B. Steeves, “The

How is this kind of imagination integral to reading? To best answer this question, we must review how one is typically taught to read literature, at least in modern, Western-style institutions. For example, the phrase “suspension of disbelief” can still be heard throughout literature classrooms as a succinct but supposedly fitting description of what occurs when someone sits down to read a work of fiction.²⁷ However, the phrase is dangerously misleading. Although I grant that a reader lends a certain amount of trust to an author in letting that author take her wherever the author pleases, this particular phrase implies that the human being’s natural state and “worldview” is that of, for example, the physicalist or materialist, a person who assumes that reality is best defined by tangibility and substance. It implies that a reader must reorient her entire view of reality (so defined) in order to grasp the meaning of a text, moving beyond the presumably secure foundation of an existence only believable because it has been verified with evidence. Such a view must presuppose that the first reaction by any reader to a text, especially when that text is considered fiction or non-historical, is that it is not real, and that the only way to continue reading is to suspend the tendency to disbelieve anything not immediately given via the senses, history, etc. That this decision is made unreflectively or unconsciously seems very hard to believe, almost as hard as believing that a reader must consciously make this

Virtual Body: Merleau-Ponty's Early Philosophy of Imagination," *Philosophy Today* 45, no. 4 (2001): 370, 372-74, 378. Merleau-Ponty's theory is a wonderful way of making the body “meaningful,” of realizing that the poesis of meaning is not a “pure” product of mental calculations, but one that involves image, posture, even the facial expressions evoked by what we read. In this way, the very practice of writing a text becomes an act of the imagination, and the printed page calls us to imagine a human form.

²⁷This phrase is attributed to Coleridge from *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 14, II.1-9. I think his use of the phrase has been too readily sloganized, for he first used it to criticize the atmosphere of empiricism, positivism, verificationism, and popular realism that surrounded him, metaphysical views perhaps stronger in our own day. Coleridge called this suspension a “poetic faith,” lending to reading a sacrality I am trying to recover and emphasize.

decision. We can of course imagine particular contexts where someone reading a text might express disbelief, but I doubt that such instances would be adduced as a reading strategy or a summation of a reading practice. Reading literary works of art, be they “fiction” or not, does not require “suspension of disbelief” or, conversely, the “imposition of belief,” but is a practice that is integral and “natural” to a form of life.²⁸ Reading is, to use more overt Sartrean language, a different mode of consciousness, like dreaming, and this is precisely where the imagination in both the sense of visualization and the discovery of possibilities is at play.

Given a literary work of art, whether or not that text purports to be fiction, what I call the “hermeneutic imagination” is at work in at least these two modes. Even if one assumes that, at some level, visualization always does occur, nevertheless, as Sartre makes clear, very rarely are readers actively imagining every scene simultaneously with the reading of it.²⁹ As he points out, this could have a slowing effect on the story, and we can still “know” how the narrative progresses, what events are taking place, without fully having to flesh these out with visual special effects. In addition, those images that do occur need not be fully formed: the reader may indeed only sketch how a room is described, or focus pictorially on the important item within the description, say a chair, a

²⁸Here we could invoke Derrida’s rejection of the “metaphysics of presence,” i.e., that voice precedes writing and is therefore more “genuine,” as another way to deconstruct the duality of fiction and non-fiction, as well as the need to make fiction “present” by denying our putative disbelief of it.

²⁹*TI* 63.

shoe, or a person.³⁰ It is enormously important to recognize, however, that the emotional impact that a literary work of art contains can still be had without complete mental visualization, though undoubtedly, depending on the context, visualization can be a part of the emotional impact of the text, and certain aspects of a text are surely meant to be envisioned. But the goal of the text is not the causing of mental representations to the point where the “ideal” text simply effaces itself in an attempt to become completely visual, as if it were a picture or a film. Language and image, as I understand them, do not name polarities on an axis of understanding, but involve one another, and in this way I find myself particularly drawn by Merleau-Ponty’s concept of imagination including synaesthesia, suggesting that meaning is the result of a weaving together of beings, images, postures, uses of words, etc. Just as meaning is destroyed by an artificial division between language and world, so it is derailed by an equally artificial division between language and image. The communication of “meaningful” events in the text are conveyed via the language game itself (which Wittgenstein insists is what thinking amounts to and from which he does not exclude “body language”), and so the poesis of meaning may include carefully constructed visualizations on the part of the reader, or may at least not be incompatible with them. It is important to note, however, that the meaning (use) of a word is not the result of matching a representation to a term, which results in a referential or correspondence theory of meaning. Similarly, authentic reading has nothing

³⁰Peter Alward makes a similar point, albeit from an analytic and what I think is a flawed view of the imagination and literature. Alward claims that all that is needed when reading fiction (which he assumes is untrue) is to imagine that it is a “report,” not to imagine that the reader herself is experiencing something and therefore attempting to simulate the emotions of someone who “really” believes what the narrative is talking about. See Peter Alward, “Leave Me out of It: De Re, but Not De Se, Imaginative Engagement with Fiction,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 64, no. 4 (2006): 451-3, 457.

to do with the proper matching of the reader's visualization with the author's own putative images, even though we can readily admit that the author certainly envisioned something and that the reader's images may have emotional overtones that allow her authentically to hear the other person(s) in the textual discourse.

From another point of view, however, the imagination does not function so much as a visualizing apparatus, but as a way of placing oneself in the position to know what a narrator knows, or what a character knows. This mode of the imagination can be considered a form of impersonation, the placing of our own persona into the narrative flow by substituting our idea of self as a "character" alongside others within the narrative. This practice is equivalent to listening to a speaker convey a certain experience and saying to oneself, "I see how she would come to such a conclusion," or "I don't know why he did that. Didn't he understand that...?" In other words, this mode of the imagination is a conscious shift to place ourselves in circumstances that we have most certainly not experienced, or, to put it another way, of adopting the perspective and memories of another, which is simultaneously the recognition that another person is also a self while stepping outside our accustomed limits of self. Such activity is dangerous, for it risks both self and others in that the reader can annihilate the self for the sake of another, or from fear of losing the self, annihilate another person's self by making her a mimic of the reader's own indifferent self, i.e., the self conceived as an ego. Inauthentic reading is defined by this latter self becoming the template for all other selves, ultimately a (doomed) attempt at solipsism.

But we as readers must be careful to distinguish between adopting a perspective and adopting an identity, for to identify with another completely is to ignore our own responsibility for discovering truth, and is to remain in the they-self not through rejection of others but by concealing our own being-there. Generally speaking, however, as readers we retain an awareness of reading as a practice in which we are engaged, which is why we can understand, for example, the protagonist's terror in the face of grisly death and be captured emotionally by such terror, yet read through to the now-expected gruesome end, rather than, say, tossing the text aside and fleeing in fear. Indeed, one can argue that the joy in reading such stories is precisely in the "thrill" of being afraid despite all the while knowing that there is "really" nothing to fear. Such a "theory," however, opens the door to analytic studies of the imagination and literature that deny the premise of my entire argument.³¹ For myself, this is the most charitable way to read Sartre's theory of the

³¹And such studies exist in abundance. Tamar Gendler focuses on what she calls "imaginative resistance," our "unwillingness" to imagine instances in fiction that we consider to be immoral. For her, imagining is a form of "participation" and therefore an affirmation of beliefs we either agree or disagree with. See Tamar Szabo Gendler, "The Puzzle of Imaginative Resistance," *The Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 2 (2000): 55-6, 80. In a reply to Gendler, Martijn Blaauw asserts that imagining something can cause us to believe it, or at least react as if we believe it, but that ultimately the imagination is not a source of knowledge. See Martijn Blaauw, "Belief and Pretense: A Reply to Gendler," *Metaphilosophy* 37, no. 2 (2006): 206, 209. Glenn Hartz claims that to be moved emotionally by reading fiction is "rational," even though we know the fiction is not "real," that our emotions are not "make-believe." Because he thinks we have beliefs that remain latent and only expressible in behavior, he can assert that the imagination acts somewhat autonomously, that is, imagining does not "produce" emotions in any considered way, they simply occur as a "by-product" of imagining. It is refreshing, however, that he does not claim that reacting emotionally to art is an irrational occurrence. See Glenn A. Hartz, "How We Can Be Moved by Anna Karenina, Green Slime, and a Red Pony," *Philosophy* 74, no. 290 (1999): 558-9, 571, and 577. Patrick Hogan returns to typical ground by claiming that literature "stimulates" the imagination to form pictures that cause emotional responses. Texts are simply "imaginative instructions," which implies a certain reliving of the author's intentions or experiences as the meaning of a text. See Patrick Hogan, "Literature, God, and the Unbearable Solitude of Consciousness," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11, no. 5/6 (2004): 138-9. Shaun Nichols considers fiction to be a "puzzle" that causes "one (or one's cognitive mechanisms) [to construct] a set of representations" (131). For Nichols, the puzzle is that we have "apparent emotional responses to fiction," that is, things we "know" are not real. His solution is that beliefs and images are "processed" the same way in the mental machinery, so both result in emotions. See Shaun Nichols, "Imagining and Believing: The Promise of a Single Code," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (2004): 131-33. Ricoeur

“irreal” outlined in *The Imaginary*. We approach literary texts complete with our knowledge, beliefs, and emotions, and “fill” the text with these, while taking into account the dramatic tension and decisions made by characters within the text.³² But what remains central for the imagination and meaning-creation is the reader’s engagement with

claims that the emotions one feels when reading are not “genuine” emotions, but what he calls “feelings,” that is, they are “structured” to the text and not “spontaneous.” See Ricoeur, “The Metaphoric Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” 157. In another essay, Ricoeur asserts that images and fiction are not “copies” of reality but meant to “model” reality in a wholly new way, resulting in fiction being little more than moral didacticism. For him, fiction refers to reality, like history, but escapes the need for verification. See Paul Ricoeur, “The Narrative Function,” *Semeia* 13 (1978): 193, 195. Sarah Worth once again asks how “unreal” fiction can give rise to “real” emotions, and questions even these latter emotions as to their authenticity. She ultimately claims that emotions are “of the body,” but some are stronger because of our beliefs, while others are weaker, the product of images. See Sarah E. Worth, “Aristotle, Thought, and Mimesis: Our Responses to Fiction,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58, no. 4 (2000): 333, 337-8. For divergent views, see for example David Schalkwyk, “Fiction as ‘Grammatical’ Investigation: A Wittgensteinian Account,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 3 (1995): 290, 292 and Martin Warner, “Literature, Truth, and Logic,” *Philosophy* 74, no. 287 (1999): 31-2, 35. Schalwyk claims, following Cavell, that the idea of existence is “suppressed” in fiction in favor of concepts. Just as an actor can show us an emotion that she herself does not feel, literature can show us much the same. What we grasp in understanding the emotion is the concept, not a concern for its existence. Ultimately, fiction is a way of “exploring” the concepts of a community. Warner explains that in the history of analytic philosophy, literature was considered “non-cognitive” (neither true nor false) because those philosophers thought the language of fiction to be “purely emotive.” He goes on to show that even though the original arguments have been given up, analytic philosophers still make a sharp division between “scientific” and “literary” language. But he points out the difficulty with the very idea of analysis: “The notion of self-evident absurdity is no less problematic than that of self-evident axiom; it is indeed its mirror image” (35).

Briefly, the analytic approach to reading and imagination confronts us with at least two problems. Firstly, the cognitive/ontological/logical/epistemological problem of biological emotional response, which is the crux of the articles I have cited. Their questions are along the lines of “If there’s really nothing to fear, and I know/believe this, how can I have a fear response? Of what am I afraid? Why?” Secondly, this line of thinking seems to imply nothing more than a (possibly flawed) theory of Aristotelian catharsis, that the purpose of art is to purge the “harmful” emotions, implying that art is only desirable if it is useful as mere entertainment and has some type of moral(izing) value. I fear that such a notion cannot help but lead to censorship of that art seen not to purge but magnify what is considered harmful (and it seems that one person’s purging is simply another’s magnification). Such a rough description of reading (“I read knowing there is nothing really there”) degrades the power of art and our imagination, and does not reflect a good understanding of reading and our engagement with language.

³²Scarry, however, takes issue with Sartre’s concept of the image, declaring that images produced by reading literature do “take us by surprise” (18). For her, a text is a set of “instructions” for making pictures from which we learn something, and “literature consists of a steady stream of erased imperatives” (20). See Scarry, “On Vivacity: The Difference between Daydreaming and Imagining-under-Authorial-Instruction,” 18-20. Stawarska denies that reading-produced images can be subsumed under a theory of “pictorial” imagination, claiming instead that “fictional images” are not images of existent things that are either absent or present. See Stawarska, “Pictorial Representation or Subjective Scenario? Sartre on Imagination,” 101.

the narrative drama that is itself the text, not simply the visualizing of actions described in the text, or following the plot, or even grasping the “theme” of the narrative that is made evident through the sequencing of events and/or characterization. Authentic reading is grounded in the hermeneutic imagination, the poiesis of meaning that takes narrative and *text* as its foundation, which means that reading (exercising the imagination as I have described) is never a solitary process whereby I as reader merely react to my own “personal” images within my mind, but is instead a practice already embedded in others (the authors) and realizing/sharing a world with them.

The hermeneutic imagination, therefore, is the power that drives the interpretation of texts.³³ In the case of message-oriented reading, for example, the reader assumes that the perspective of the narrator or protagonist will uncover in some way the “theme” of the narrative (just as in *The Stranger*, Camus’ theme “life is absurd” is conveyed by what befalls the central character). For such readers, narration not only can serve as a “vehicle” of a certain perspective, but also as a way to make a certain worldview believable, perhaps even believable enough to be adopted. It is here that readers are comfortable discussing authorial intent and their agreement with it, since the context

³³In laying out my ideas, I use the language of literary studies, especially as it applies to what is generally considered fiction, for my examples. This simply reflects my own background and should not be seen as a limiting of the activity of reading to only works of literature like novels, short stories, etc. As I have noted previously, sacred texts, philosophy, etc. are also forms of literary art wherein the reader is called to respond to the text by creating a meaning for the text. As readers, we can certainly discern genre differences, but the essential difference between a sacred text and a novel is in the reading strategy itself, not the categories of fiction or non-fiction, or the putative truth of the one and the “mere fantasy” of the other. As I will explain further in this chapter, readers approach sacred texts as being already authoritative for human action, and the language of such texts themselves already co-opts this authoritative stance. This authoritative stance, usually couched in moralizing language and value judgments, all but demands a response from the reader, but the general activity of meaning-creation remains the same for all literary works of art. The reader remains responsible for her own beliefs and actions, her own reading and poiesis of said beliefs.

makes clear such themes are indeed proposed by the narrative. But for reading that is authentic, a theme, often reduced to a single sentence, can only masquerade as “the” meaning of the narrative. As we saw in chapter 3, literary art calls to the reader in a way that single propositions or language reduced to mere information do not.

Yet the important point for my purposes here is that the hermeneutic imagination is no less responsible for founding certain moral values or beliefs as a “theme” of the text than it is for questioning the reader-subject, for in adopting the perspectives within a text, we retain our ability to agree or disagree with decisions made by characters, or with certain interpretations of situations made clear within the text. The desire for knowing “the” meaning of a text or for reducing it to a summary that could theoretically substitute for the text corresponds to that notion of self that weighs the significance of objects (here a text), to find what is “valuable” within it. In this way, there is a kind of doubling of activity in the practice of reading. Ontologically, the “I” is always in search of a self, but the self it alights on may be the they-self, reducing Dasein to no more than the indifferent I-subject. Or the search may “end” in an authentic clearing of the self, a recognition of its own becoming through the author(s), a self not finalized as substance or static entity, nor as a sign in continuous flux. Reading always offers us these two possibilities of poiesis, and as readers we can never be free of this responsibility to create a meaning for the text. As I use the phrase, the poiesis of belief does not mean affirming the self as subject or inventing a law code, for poiesis always remains grounded in another’s discourse, what I have called earlier the “inexpressible.” But of course many readers think this is precisely the point of reading sacred texts in particular, namely the affirmation of already held

beliefs or the discovery of timeless and universal doctrines. The polysemous nature of the literary work of art, however, belies these assumptions of inauthentic reading practice by revealing that meaning arises in language on a foundation other than that of a worldview held by an ego-subject. What becomes most important for the reader who recognizes this plurivocity is the exploration of such multiple meanings in hopes of deepening one's own understanding of text and self, not the ranking of meanings according to their correctness.

It will be seen by now that authentic poesis is not the result of the "subjective" reaction of an individual reader, but is a human practice founded on the discourse between reader and author(s). We must remember that all texts are produced within the midst of others, what Wittgenstein would call the language game. Since learning a language makes one a full player of the game, someone who can read the language at issue will be readily able to identify all grammatically well-formed texts as conforming to the language game in question. One can, of course, still fail to understand sophisticated material or texts using archaic or highly complex vocabulary and grammatical structures; but my point is simply that an author, herself also a full player of the game, cannot produce a text that is completely alien to the game. The "reading game," from this Wittgensteinian point of view, is immediately on the same footing as ordinary spoken discourse, the nature of which, as we have seen, is not reducible to a matter of propositional correspondence to some other "reality" or the assertion of the existence of objects. Language games do not convey data that exists in a-contextual vacua, even when they appear to do so, for example, in the language of science (which is of course a

contextualized practice). Rather, learning and engaging in a language game is a matter of sharing a life with others. The genesis of the game and its continuation lies in the discovery (or assertion) of what is important and valued amongst a group of people holding a language in common. This means that of course texts are rife with the moral and ethical beliefs of a particular society, something which the structuralist approach to literature helped bring to the surface.

The language game, therefore, can be conceived as the Heideggerian Being-with relationship that establishes grounds for evaluation and judgement in the first place, the region of revelation and “attunement,” and emotions toward that revelation; discourse as Being-with is not then conceived as some ideal language that should be devoid of subjectivity, emotion, ambiguity, and vagueness.³⁴ However, a person who understands the self to be only a belief-oriented subject possesses a theoretical, i.e., metaphysical approach to language, for language from this perspective can only be considered a vehicle for beliefs, the “content” of which the subject can “observe” from outside the linguistic process. A reader who does not realize that the avowal of propositional beliefs is our initial response to the world through what Heidegger calls an “indifferent I” erroneously concludes that such beliefs are ontologically primary and the ground for interpreting everything else, including texts. The hermeneutic imagination of such a reader will ceaselessly impose its own system of beliefs (worldview) as the measure of the meaning

³⁴Crary is a good example of a contemporary anti-positivist. She attacks such a notion of language by critiquing those who think that meaning and morality can be bound up in propositions without regard to contexts. She argues for a “wider objectivity” that includes consideration of the emotions throughout *Beyond Moral Judgment*, but see especially 190.

of any text—the text is either acceptable because it is considered to be in agreement with certain beliefs or should be rejected if it cannot be said to support those beliefs.

Such guiding beliefs do not have to be moral or ethical only, but can also be philosophical. For example, such a reader may hold to a correspondence theory, that the verification of actuality lies in the notion of an agreement between an (internal/mental) concept and an (external/substantial) object that “corrects” our language to reflect such an agreement. At the risk of oversimplifying these complex theories, they can be described as follows: the physical world conforms to certain laws that dictate action and reaction, cause and effect. A person may think she knows something, say the velocity of a certain projectile, but when attempting to apply this knowledge to solve a problem, discovers that her beginning assumptions were in error, since the desired result is not attained. She has been “corrected” by that actuality of the physical world, and no amount of wishing a different result will make it so. While most rational people will not dispute this particular result, as a holistic, theoretical view, this line of thinking is at bottom concerned with a single demand: only correct assertions should count as truth, or, even more simply, truth is defined as correctness, an equivalence Heidegger clarified as the guiding light of such thinking. From the perspective and context of the given example, it is completely understandable that subjectivity, emotions, and wishful thinking should play a limited role with regard to “truth.” Or to use an example of Wittgenstein’s, no one cares in a court of law if *I* say I know something; the court is only concerned with those bits of knowledge anyone could be in a position to know, so they will ask me to prove what I

claim to know.³⁵ Or to use an even more common and infuriating example, most of us are rather annoyed when someone turns off the air conditioning in a hot and crowded room because they “feel” cold. We do not dispute the feeling (we allow for this kind of incorrigibility), we simply think a more broadly based standard should be followed in this context, rather than just how one person feels. With the exaltation of technological science in contemporary society, however, the notion that truth is a matter of correctness, of language being a transparent medium through which the external environment reveals itself, has been extended to all things linguistic, including reading and interpretation. The positivist reader whose ultimate value is correctness is unnerved by multiple interpretations of the same text, by each individual’s being responsible for constructing a meaning for a text, and demands to know which interpretation is the “right” one, the one that “correctly corresponds” to the text itself, under this view understood as an object in the world and best defined by physical properties and measurable fluctuations in activity.

The positivist’s fear, described above, of an always open multiplicity of approaches to meaning tends to lead to an accusation of “wishful thinking” for those who advocate such multiplicity, but there are at least two reasons why this accusation is unfounded. As we have seen from chapter 3, the very foothold of such an accusation is lost since truth is not wholly synonymous with correctness for, briefly put, correctness itself must first be a possibility. This means that language must be able to reveal beings to us prior to our adopting any behavior toward them, the result being that Dasein cannot be the master of Being, i.e., control or dictate the revelation of beings (to do so would

³⁵OC 441.

leave us no entities to encounter). Truth is found in that revelation, and that uncovering (dis-covering) happens in the activity of discourse among persons. To locate truth in this intersubjective space is to stay in the realm of the between, the difference between beings and Being, not as carefully bounded, presumed objects, but as a way of understanding the implication of each within the other.³⁶ The language game is the medium of this holding in the between, and is not at all the product of “wishful thinking.” I do not speak and by speaking bring it about that the world is as I say it is; the world strikes me as being such and so, and so is for me, and I speak it out to be so.

This leads to the second reason why a non-metaphysically oriented approach to reading is not an accidental sliding into wishful thinking or some form of relativism. The writing and reading of literary art has nothing to do with normative empirical propositions like those of a scientific theory or hypothesis where concepts are not only imagined and tested, but verified concepts become a rule for further investigation. Literary works of art are not written for the purpose of describing a physical environment or scientific theories or concepts, even if they happen to contain or make use of many. If such were the case, then ranking interpretations of the text according to correctness, indeed, ranking the correctness of the text itself, would be called for. The world of the type of text important to this dissertation, the literary work of art, is a shared human world, a form of life, a language game that could in no way even be written without invoking that form of life. It may indeed question the norms or beliefs of that world, but it must still operate within it,

³⁶Heidegger in his later essays began to cross out the word “Being” precisely to free his readers from thinking of Being and beings as two coordinated things.

not simply to be understood, but indeed even to be written. The poiesis of meaning, though unique to every individual reader, must conform to the world of the text and to the wider world of the language game in which the text itself partakes. If it does not, we will assume that the reader does not know how to read, or is only playing at reading, or that the reader may not even understand the language at issue. To put the point more bluntly, a reader's interpretation, if made in fairness, will always conform to the text being read in that it will speak to (or fail to speak to) what the text is about. One could not, unless trying to deceive, "misinterpret" the text, if that is to mean "assert a thematic interpretation of the text without regard to the text."³⁷ Reading would indeed be a pointless and unnecessary exercise if the interpretation of texts through the hermeneutic imagination took place before any texts were read, as if one could speak without having a language (which is the kind of thinking Wittgenstein would call "real" nonsense).

I hope to have shown that the interpretation of texts, though heavily reliant on the desires, knowledge, and experience an individual brings to texts, is not an arbitrary exercise. Since reading takes place within our lives as an activity of the imagination that demands a meaning be created, a decision be made, we approach it armed with what we bring to every decision we make. Certainly most people would not dispute that in the everyday course of events, one makes decisions using the knowledge, desires, and experiences at one's disposal. But if we then claim that every decision made by every

³⁷I assume here a reader fully immersed in the language game and considered mentally competent. It is of course possible that mental psychoses and certain chemicals could cause one's interpretation of a text to be nothing more than an expression of illusions or delusions. This caveat is similar to the one previous where I assume we are talking about full players of the language game, not children or learners who can still make honest mistakes with language. In this respect, I also exclude the mature player of the game guilty of a bad interpretation due to solecism or misremembering the use of a word.

person is entirely arbitrary, the mere result of the will of the human agent, we shatter the unity of both world and discourse through an unbearable load of skepticism that is belied through language itself (which is at least one way to read Wittgenstein's "private language argument"). Part of our form of life is to assume that every person has reasons for their actions, that they will turn to some form of "external" verification for why they acted in such a way and that limited the range of possible decisions (the chain of reasons Wittgenstein discusses in *BB*, to which I refer in chapter 2). Even tyrants and the insane have their reasons. Literary works of art supply us with that situation (the "event") that bounds the scope of possible decisions, of possible chosen values, as Sartre might say. Such values are no less ultimately groundless because of this, but as Wittgenstein might ask, what other ground could we be looking for? Doesn't the search for a ground finally have to come to a rest?

Before moving on to the last section of this chapter, a final note about the "power" of the imagination to transform the self is in order, especially since Sartre denied the image any heuristic qualities. Keeping within the phenomenology of reading as it were, and still using literature as an example, we often do feel that we learn something from fiction, a deep truth about life itself.³⁸ Sartre might claim that such a feeling is an

³⁸Noël Carroll gives a nice overview of traditional philosophical arguments for why literature does not truly educate or teach, ultimately claiming that such arguments hamstring themselves by using narrative "thought experiments" to help teach philosophical precepts. See Noël Carroll, "The Wheel of Virtue: Art, Literature, and Moral Knowledge," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 60, no. 1 (2002): 4-10. However, Carroll then reduces all literature to propositions, concerned with the true and false (14). Also, Carroll has "assumed that there is such a thing as moral knowledge and that it can be taught" (25n100). The door is opened to discerning "immoral" artworks and so also to censorship. For his part, D. F. Pears thinks that imagination in philosophy is a "loose cannon." It is purely pictorial, and not "controlled by reason or experience." See D. F. Pears, "Literalism and Imagination: Wittgenstein's Deconstruction of Traditional Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10, no. 1 (2002): 8.

illusion. Wittgenstein might claim that the “deep truth” discovered is simply the result of reflection on the “deep truth” of the language game itself, the beliefs hidden so to speak within the form of life to which the language belongs. But what of those authors who dispute a culture’s norms and codes of conduct and whose criticisms are expressed through their works, “fiction” though they may be? And what accounts for the feeling of learning something, even if we were to assume that such a feeling is somehow mistaken or not analogous to acquiring data?

It will be clear by now that the creative, authentic practice of reading can indeed “teach” us something in that through this practice we can “learn” to be an authentic self, though this lesson is never finished and is by nature aporetic. The more important question here is not so much *what* we learn via the working of the hermeneutic imagination, but *how* we learn through it. Taking Sartre as a starting point, the world “outside” us, which includes not only the physical environment but every other person, is often for us something to be possessed.³⁹ The birth of subject and object occurs when we begin to desire to possess, and we can see here an implied connection between possessing and valuing, that objectification discovers the inauthentic, value-oriented, “technologized” self. Sartre argues that objects come to exist for us in our efforts to reach our ends, and though we may think or suppose an object is our end, our desire is never satisfied with objects, and once we possess them, the desire to possess just begins anew.

³⁹On desire to possess the Other, see *BN* 509. See also 736 and 740. Kołakowski claims that the relationship defined by possession makes something mine but “sacrifices” my “positive relations with others.” In possessing, we lose ourselves and become the “sum” of what we possess. See Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, 77-8.

As Sartre also makes clear,⁴⁰ we must imagine an end different from what is present before us just to go about our daily lives, and this necessity affirms the intimacy between identity and imagination; we make the conscious decision to ignore all else in the name of fulfilling our end, so the world is not structured with knowledge, but with ignorance, an ignorance we often pay for but which we desperately need in order to take action and make a decision—it is the self-imposed limitation that makes the freedom of decision possible.⁴¹ It is where we are ignorant that we are teachable, and where literary art, which includes the sacred text, holds an important place.

The literary work of art via the imagination “teaches” the reader by setting or offering forth a world. The world of the text is a confined world, a world held in stasis—we can stop reading when we wish, we can reread (relive) when we wish. In other words, reading makes it possible for us to become explicitly aware of the passage of time, our own ec-static being where reading is a memory, a present, and a future. This world offers us a different perspective, and reading offers us a way of slowing down and examining decisions and activities and thereby reflecting on our own decisions and activities. How often do we recognize ourselves in a story, much to our chagrin and

⁴⁰TI 184, as well as the conclusion to the entire work. See also BN 562.

⁴¹A central but inchoate conclusion of Sartre’s *Truth and Existence*. See especially 59: “[I]gnorance must *inhabit* all truth not only as the soil from which Truth draws its origin and can be rediscovered in transcended form as its temporalization (*becoming* truth: all truth is ignorance having become truth; the necessary temporalization of truth or verification: freedom as foundation of truth requires that it itself emerge from ignorance) *but also* as finitude, as its shadowy side. [...] Truth, as human undertaking, is interiorization of ignorance because ignorance is the finitude of truth. [...] It is to choose to see *this* to the exclusion of all the rest...it is to make *this* appear on the rest of the world envisaged as *ground*, that is, undifferentiated plenum of being (ignorance). [...] Freedom is the foundation of knowledge. The limit of knowledge is also freedom. Freedom does not create finitude; on the contrary it is through finitude that there is freedom” (original italics).

occasionally to our horror? This possibility of examining and creating the self is given in the imaginative mode only and is the gift of the text, more precisely, of the author(s). It is not that what we learn from the text is its only possible meaning, for as I have attempted to show, this meaning is still the result of our freely chosen and finite beliefs. But we have arrived at this interpretation along a path that does not exist, indeed cannot exist, within the mode of perception of empirical phenomena, that mode of being concerned with manipulating things and thereby understanding them to be only mere objects for use.⁴² Nor does understanding truth as a type of correspondence, or coherence, or endless signification allow discourse, the literary work of art, to reveal, to unconceal. These routes of thinking only hide the thing from our sight, reduce its thing-ness to where it, as thing, is all but invisible and we no longer wonder at it. Rather, the imaginative mode, the practice of reading, offers us more truth than the logical, sensory, or symbolic mode, for it suspends ends and thereby reveals entities as entities, the basis of truth and the necessary ground for any assertion of belief or value.⁴³ Reading allows us to reflect on the process of imagining ends and means, on grounds, and is a way of inhabiting another's world. In so doing, we choose to envision a self that denies subjectivity in the modern sense, for we have come to ignore the objects that our desires posited. Authentic

⁴²I am indebted to Heidegger's essay "The Question Concerning Technology" for clarifying this notion.

⁴³With regard to poetry, Simon Critchley says the poem is "part of the thing and not about it." See Simon Critchley, "Poetry as Philosophy--on Wallace Stevens," *European Journal of American Culture* 24, no. 3 (2005): 180. And Jung has this to say about the work of art: "But a work of art is not transmitted or derived—it is a creative reorganization of those very conditions to which a causalistic [sic] psychology must always reduce it [...] In the same way, the meaning and individual quality of a work of art inhere within it and not in its extrinsic determinants. One might almost describe it as a living being that uses man." In C. G. Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, ed. William McGuire, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 72.

reading also stimulates our care by allowing us to extend our emotional range beyond that of fulfilling desires or having desires thwarted. Instead, our desire is subsumed by our resisting objectification of entities, and the literary world, our world, seems to become more alive, more unknowable, for in what Heidegger calls the everyday “fallen” world, we treat objects and the world as if they are fully knowable and within our grasp.

Through the creative practice of reading, we are perturbed to realize and learn that we are not a stable self, that our imagination overflows the ego falsely considered ever present and unchanging, an “indifferent I” oriented by beliefs and calculations of every object’s value. Reading offers us the possibility of understanding that we ourselves are as mysterious as an unknown person, and to wonder at such knowledge.

Part III: Reading and the “House of Being”

As already discussed in chapter 3, Heidegger reveals the shortcomings of a sign-theory of language, reconceptualizes truth as unhiddenness or disclosure, and offers us a new idea of language as the “house of Being,” all of which has important implications for the philosophical understanding of the nature of reading I am attempting to develop here. It is my understanding that conceiving writing as being purely symbolic in nature underlies the misconceiving of reading (and language) as a decoding of signs or symbols. By realizing the weaknesses of conceiving the nature of language to be symbolism, I can clarify the nature of reading as a mode of Being-with, not as the solving of a word puzzle that results in interpretation.

If written language is understood to be purely symbolic in function and origin, it can be seen as a technological invention, originally conceived as a representation or

“image” of spoken discourse. Put another way, written language is generally considered to correspond with other objects, even if such “objects” are vocalizations. Markings on stone, wood, clay, or some form of paper are thought to represent something else. In hieroglyphic writing, for example, a glyph can represent a whole concept or thing (like a house), a sound from the language (a precursor of modern alphabets), or even a determination (like direction or speed) that is not even spoken or read aloud but simply part of the word itself. Letters of modern alphabets are also generally considered to represent vocalizations of sounds that “spell out” words. However, such notions of writing have led to a common error: that language itself (discourse), that which cannot be dated like the artifactual remains of writing such as tablets, etc., is in essence symbolic, a system of signs representing either physical objects or more “abstract” things, like ideas and concepts.⁴⁴ For Heidegger, such an approach to language is in large part responsible for maintaining what he calls the “metaphysical” approach to reality, an approach that asserts that the nature of language is the metaphor, a screen through which what is real may be seen or be hidden. Such an approach is forced to stipulate that words are rather arbitrary constructs that somehow become “attached” to things or objects and therefore are a type of addition to the “real” world itself.⁴⁵ One can see here the origin of a Platonic

⁴⁴Derrida of course denied the precedence of speech over writing, and I concur with his critique that concludes one mode of language cannot be “better” or “more truthful” than another. As far as I am concerned, writing and vocalization are both language, not simply “linguistic,” even though they communicate differently. Where I cannot agree with Derrida is in his assumption that the nature of language is that of a system of signs. Altieri accuses the early Derrida of Kantian notions of language, that Derrida “accepts the idea that essences must be expressible in rational, self-justifying formal systems, then he proceeds to deny the possibility that such systems can even truly represent anything.” See Altieri, “Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory,” 1410.

⁴⁵As described in Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 47-8.

prejudice against literature as outlined in *The Republic*, a prejudice based on what I consider to be a mistaken conception of language: a disavowal of language as a merely human projection or representation of what reality appears to us to be, a representation which holders of this prejudice consider more often than not erroneous and, given its connection with the limitations of perception and ego-driven desires, barely a passing approximation of the real. If language were merely a system of signs, however, both analytic philosophers in the Western tradition and poststructuralists (strange bedfellows!) would be largely correct in their theories of how meaning arises in language, and my own concept of reading would collapse, for it rests not on how a static system of signs is interpreted but on how we engage language as a form of *life*, a living, dynamic, evolving, *thinking* activity that is the source of truthfulness itself, not the representation of yet another body of truth “outside” of language.

From a Wittgensteinian or Heideggerian perspective, we do not learn language and words as a step-by-step assimilation of sounds. That is indeed how we learn to spell (if our particular language is alphabetic), how we come to understand phonetics and eventually look up words in dictionaries, “sound them out” in order to ask questions about them, etc. But in the language game of “ostensive definition” (how children are taught words by, e.g., pointing to a chair and saying “chair”), one does not necessarily visualize a correspondence between sounds and objects. The word “chair” does not float in some ghostly fashion on the blackboard of the mind, but that sound becomes identical

with the thing—in short, the thing now comes to have a *name*.⁴⁶ The thing has been revealed, it can now be questioned, examined, its name used in other sentences (thoughts), etc. Neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein think it sensible to claim that names secure meaning via reference, that the sound somehow “covers” the thing like a gauze, now making visible, now making invisible certain properties of the object that “tell” us what it is and what it possibly means. It is important for my concept of reading to understand that names are not signs, symbols, or metaphors directing one’s attention to a deeper reality that remains unknown; they are the known, that particular revelation upon which the truth of correctness depends, upon which the house of Being can be built.

To think of language and naming in this fashion is of course to find the foundations of the structuralist and semiotic view of language to be misconceptions or at best incomplete notions, views that are themselves built on or in contention with the far older metaphorical view of language that undergirds most traditional, analytic philosophy’s critique of the shortcomings of language and literature.⁴⁷ Furthermore, such

⁴⁶It is important for me to maintain the idea of identity, not just a notion of a sound identified with a thing. The latter way of speaking seems to invite a kind of correspondence I am attempting to deny, a table of sounds that “mean” something by being correlated with their object. I also want to preserve the synesthetic quality of language and memory, that words often have a feeling to them, a posture, even a shape and a color, elements that I feel are important for our use of language and how we even perceive objects. In a similar vein, Mulhall notes “if words call the things they name, if they command their appearance and commend their essential nature into our thoughtful keeping, then words are not a means for thinking or a medium for the expression of thoughts but are rather themselves thoughtful.” In Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, 308.

⁴⁷Umberto Eco is perhaps the most well-known spokesperson for semiotics. Although semiosis assumes that language is a system of signs, Eco claims that interpretations cannot stretch to “infinity” because the interpreter has to know both aspects of the sign, as it were, its “content” and its “expression.” Eco claims that this will result in a more “exact” interpretation, that texts have a “set of instructions encoded” within the signs (25). In addition to a reference, words also encode an inference, which according to Eco narrows the range of interpretations. To avoid any idea that semiosis is a form of tallying signs, Eco assures us that interpretation entails “social certitude,” that “the conditions of necessity of a sign are socially determined” (38). Because signs are interlinked in an enormous “continuum,” one never meets the “original object” but

a view of language as that held by Heidegger and Wittgenstein will have profound implications for how one understands truth and knowledge, implications some of which are already explored above. But to reiterate with Heidegger, truth “is still a...trait of beings themselves” in that they are “unhidden,” not a “mark” of human behavior directed at things, which a correspondence theory of truth entails when it makes correctness the standard of truth.⁴⁸ In other words, truth as the correctness of assertions or decoding of signs is not the nature of truth, but truth as the revelation of beings, i.e., the naming of beings, language, which takes place in/as “Dasein,” is the foundation or “essence” of truth. This truth must first be possible before any particular relationship between humans and other beings can be established, for example, the relationship established by empirical propositions or the language of science. Conceiving truth so differently can be jarring because we live in a technological age where empirical propositions and truth as correct assertion, the correct assigning of predicates to subjects, has been exalted, as cogently explored in Heidegger’s essay “The Question Concerning Technology.” We have, for all intents and purposes, been conditioned to believe that the nature of truth is

a “summation of encyclopedic knowledge” (75). In this way, he denies that meaning is founded in ostensive definition or through a causal theory (such as Kripke’s). See especially 15-16, 24-5, 35, 38, 44, and 75 of Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). As for ancient theories of language, Giovanni Manetti claims that Plato’s theory of language has a “distinctly semiotic character” (56) and conceives language to be a poor “tool” for acquiring knowledge of the real. Manetti demonstrates that the semiotic character of Plato’s theory is in the assumption that language did or should “reveal” the “nature” of things. He goes on to say that for Aristotle, language was a symbolic system that created meaning via “convention,” not “revelation.” See Giovanni Manetti, *Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, trans. Christine Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 56, 66, and 74.

⁴⁸See previous chapter, but for one instance of the argument, see Martin Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 177: “As unhiddenness, truth is still a fundamental trait of beings themselves. But as the correctness of the ‘gaze,’ it becomes a characteristic of human comportment toward beings.”

scientific, that is, the correct assignation of qualities or essences to things, and therefore only truth as correct assertion can be labeled “objective” and so devoid of subjectivity, whim, and emotion. To claim anything else is often to be accused of flirting with relativism. But it is important to see here that thinkers like Heidegger are attempting to break free of the very argument that forces us to see only two paths: either metaphysical realism with its correspondence theory of truth and knowledge is correct and best captures reality, or the play of signs and symbols and how they appear and affect individuals is the best “description” of reality. As Heidegger makes clear in an effort to have us escape this dilemma, for those at the beginning of thinking in the Western tradition (the pre-Socratics), “subject” and “object” had completely reversed meanings to the meanings those two terms came to have in modern philosophy.⁴⁹ The term “subject” described beings that “exist independently,” while “object” described things only insofar as they were represented as useful for reaching some particular whim or desire. Plato’s radical “doctrine” of truth would eventually lead to the modern usage of these two terms—a doctrine Heidegger neither condemns nor praises but sees as the essence of humanism.⁵⁰ The point is that it is through human beings as the lens of language that the truth of beings is revealed, not through subjects correctly denoting or describing objects. This is how language becomes the “house of Being” and the locus of truth (revelation and discovery), which is not to say that human beings are the *makers* of truth. As discourse,

⁴⁹See Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, 82, as well as the appendix to Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 58.

⁵⁰See Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” 181.

texts are part of this “house,” and to read authentically is therefore to participate in the discourse, to help build and maintain a space for beings within that larger space we call language.

Reading is not, then, the decomposing and decoding of disparate signs, a concept which not only includes individual words, but the compositing of these signs into “larger” signs, i.e., sentences, and finally sentences into texts that signify or represent something else. But if we deny the revelation of beings and Being that words are, then we are left with the Kantian assumption that beings in themselves are never revealed but only signified and represented, which is precisely what the structuralist, deconstructionist, and semiotician must posit.⁵¹ Reading would then fall prey to a specialized form of analysis

⁵¹For a concise demonstration of a semiotician doing exactly this, see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 20-22, which I will quote at length: “A natural language (or any other semiotic system) is articulated at two levels or planes. There is an expression-plane, which, in natural languages, consists of a lexicon, phonology and a syntax. There is also a content-plane, which represents the array of concepts we can express. Each of these two levels can be subdivided into form and substance, and each arises through organizing a still unshaped continuum. [...] For natural languages, the *expression-form* is represented by the phonological system, by the lexical repertoire and by the rules of syntax. Realizing through concrete utterances the possibilities provided by the expression-form, we produce *expression-substances*, like the words that we utter or the text that you are now reading. In elaborating its expression-form, a language selects, out of the continuum of sounds that it is theoretically possible for the human voice to make, a particular subset of phonemes, and excludes other sounds which therefore do not belong to that language.

In order for the sounds of speech to become meaningful, the words formed from them must have meanings associated with them; they must, in other words, possess a content. [...] In order to be able to convey meaning, a natural language must establish a connection between elements (or units) of the expression-form and elements (or units) of the content-form...In fact, natural language works by a *double articulation*. The units of first articulation (like words, or lexemes and morphemes arranged into syntagms) are meaningful; the units of second articulation (the phonemes of a natural language) are devoid of meaning. The sound *d* of *dog* (and, in this case, even the letter *d* of the written word) does not represent a part of a dog or of the definition of dog” (original italics).

My more general point is that the three groups I name above assume that meaning arises in language as if by a sign pointing to its referent, that some sort of division exists between a word and its meaning. While the deconstructionist is right to point out that there is no “transcendental signified,” which was intended to anchor the structuralist and semiotic approaches to meaning, she ends her critique by insisting that meaning arises through the play of signs, still affirming that language is essentially a system of signs. As I have said before, it is this latter assumption that I question and that I think leads to a misconception of both meaning and the practice of reading.

(i.e., become an elitist practice, the scientific study of the literary artifact) in order for us to understand how the hermeneutic imagination works and how the multiplicity of various interpretations of a particular text are possible, analysis which all three schools of thought claim to possess. Moreover, we would have no way to deny the authority of such elite schools of interpretation, and a particular text's meaning would simply have to be memorized by the "general" reader. Reading would not be a living, thinking, creative activity, but simply a form of recitation, an exercise reinforcing prescribed behaviors and thoughts. Instead, taking our cue from Wittgenstein, *all* words are "liquid," not because this is their "nature" as signs, or because we willfully assign meanings to words to fit our whimsy, but because our imaginative engagement with others creates contextual shifts and new uses (meanings) for the words in question. There is no a priori limit to the amount or types of contexts, so there is no a priori limit to the meanings (uses) of words, and they will remain forever "liquid." Heidegger's concept of the house of Being helps reveal the historicity of words, and reading is one mode of understanding polysemy as the temporal character of Being, since texts inscribe time. It is within the house of Being that we learn to create and to respond, and the literary work of art, as a mode of discourse, fills this edifice. As we transcend, desire, reveal, or wander in error in and through discourse, so we also do in the reading of texts and the creation of meaning originating with those texts.

Part III.1: Reading and Poiesis

The engagement with language in and through reading is a response to all that language reveals of Being as well as our own Da-sein ("being-there" or "there-being,"

literally translated). Hence the multiplicity of “themes” found within literary works of art: psychological or social truths, a different way of regarding objects, history, or persons, sustained examination of emotional states, etc. To recognize and respond to these revelations is to be within what Heidegger would call the “hermeneutical circle” with no desire to “escape” it, since doing so would annihilate the possibility of any meaning, of understanding texts to be offering us the opportunity to exercise the hermeneutical imagination in the poesis of self. In this section, I will focus on how beliefs, religious or otherwise, “constructed” through the reading of the text, rely on what is ultimately unsayable by ourselves alone and therefore meaningless prior to any engagement with others, thereby summarizing the thesis of this work: texts do indeed help us arrive at beliefs, an identity construction, through imaginative reflection via another’s language, language that is itself ultimately unfounded on any grounds, rational or otherwise—that is, language without the need to support or excuse its own existence by claiming to be functional in origin through the relaying of information, by navigating a world of objects, etc. The reader sets her own foundation only for it to crumble away at the next reading, in the next situation or engagement with another author, or even the same author. The creation of meaning is an enlightenment only in that it conceals and reveals how much darkness remains, the mutuality of the self and others, a call and a response never spoken enough.

My own conception of reading attempts to avoid a common dichotomous view of the poesis of belief that reading makes possible (I should point out once again that the view in question itself rests on conceiving beliefs as propositions, as linguistic statements

the content of which reduces to behaviors or supposedly timeless laws that can be applied the same way in every conceivable context). On one end of the axis is the view that can ultimately be reduced to the notion that a reader's beliefs are embedded in the text, that the text somehow directly determines these beliefs and presents them to the reader. Here, all meaning is localized within the text, and the reader brings nothing to the act of reading but the understanding of a grammar and a vocabulary. The reader is, in one important sense, hollow and passive, while the text is rich, full, and active. At the other pole, we have that view which can be reduced to the opposite notion: that all meanings, all beliefs, reside with the reader, that the reader learns absolutely nothing from a text and that the text is a bounded hollow into which one pours already well-formed beliefs and the meaning of the text. Both of these views rest, either explicitly or not, on rather sophisticated philosophies of language and epistemologies. The text-as-causative approach relies more or less on correspondence theories of truth and knowledge, as well as logical-positivist theories of language. Language here, at least ideally, must be completely transparent and let "reality" shine through, must be completely unambiguous and clear so that referents will be readily identifiable and allow the language to speak plainly, rendering beliefs possible. The reader-as-determinative approach relies on an idealist or skeptical epistemology and the notion that reality, at least textual reality, obeys the whims and concepts/representations of the reader. Other views of course attempt to deconstruct this duality, but they do so at the cost of ignoring or failing to assert that the literary work of art is indeed a work, and they maintain a theoretical distance that forces the work to stand for or represent an ideology whose meaning can be decoded and

critiqued. For this “middle path” as it were, reading remains an activity of distance and either a conscious or un- or subconscious comparison of beliefs extracted from the text as well-defined propositions.

But as I have argued up to this point, the most important relationship in reading is that between author and reader, not author and text, not reader and text. Only because there is a tendency to consider texts to be equivalent to physical objects called “books” can they be examined, albeit erroneously, in objectivizing terms. Thus, we come to have histories of publishing, investigations into the origins of our modern book, histories of printers, monographs on the use and abuse of metaphors, similes, and other stylistic devices (which claim to reveal why words mean what they do), etc., all of which rely for their evidence on the actual physical artifact of the book and the characteristics or literary styles of the written page taken as an object for investigation. The text, however, is not a book, but a mode of discourse. The important *relationship* therefore is not that between the reader and the text nor that between the author and the text, but that between the human beings involved in the discourse, namely author and reader. In and through that very involvement with one another, they together also share a relationship with (what Heidegger might call “Being-toward”) what the discourse (text) is “about.” These two sharers, as it were, the author and the reader, find their togetherness and their possibility for transformation through each other in the discourse, which is their shared dwelling in the “house of Being” that is language.

The meaning of any discourse is “found” of course within that wider range of exchange (the language game again) and includes not only a particular context (the

“event” that is the text), but also the shifting boundaries of language formed by both the speaker and listener, author and reader. The interpretation one comes away with as the result of reading a text is bounded by such contexts and is “constructed” within them. On the one hand are the wide boundaries of the language game shared by author and reader; on the other is the particular situation (the text) supplied by the author within these boundaries. This “double context” also exists in our everyday speech, and, generally speaking, we never question it. We speak both from within the understanding of a common tongue and in the context of a particular situation, be that of salutation, banking, scientific research, or play. The poesis of belief, of meaning, occurs in an understanding interpretation of and imaginative engagement with this double-context. There is undoubtedly a psychological element to all beliefs, and beliefs seem to strike us with a sense of necessity, a “mustness.” To put it another way, I do not want to deny that an understanding, imaginative interpretation includes personal reasons why we believe what we believe (and, to heed Wittgenstein once again, these personal reasons can never wholly be private, can never secure a meaning impossible for others), why we think a text has a particular meaning, but these reasons do not often hold pride of place among the host of reasons we could bring forward in an attempt to rationalize beliefs, which often includes appeals to empirical data, cultural norms, trust in respected authorities, and the like. To take an example from Wittgenstein, though a religionist may have all sorts of rational reasons ready to support her beliefs, we are often fairly sure that these rational grounds are not really what *led* this person to these beliefs in the first place (to use Wittgenstein’s own example, someone believes the Gospels not because of historical

proof, but because she comes to them “lovingly,” and this is what gives rise to the sense of certainty in holding a given belief).⁵² In other words, context, personal reasons, and rational argument do not relieve us of being responsible for our beliefs, and we cannot simply pass off this responsibility to the evidence we may adduce in favor of those beliefs, evidence that may feel perfectly reasonable and seem universally binding.⁵³ We have chosen our interpretations, not in the sense that one chooses apples amongst a variety of fruits, but in deciding either to impose the self by placing already held beliefs into the text as if it were a vessel for them, or to discover the nature of the self as both being and becoming by hearing another in and through the text. If we choose the former, what the text is worth to us and what it means in general is measured by our beliefs (viewed as propositions) and the self viewed simply as an ego or subjectivity. Indeed, the worthiness of the text, its validity as it were, and the beliefs (meaning) we have constructed for it are intimately tied. We tend not to put great value on a text whose own supposed system of beliefs we perceive to be antithetical to our own (although such a text may remain for us a negative example of what not to think or believe). But a further imaginative reflection on the creative activity reading itself helps us to understand that our articulation of meaning is itself poetic, changeable, that other meanings for the text are not only possible but absolutely inevitable given the revelatory nature of language. Such a reflection and such a choice, however, require that we find ourselves worthy to be

⁵²CV 32, 85-6.

⁵³Mulhall asserts that “Being the basis of a nullity” means being “resolute” on an individual path, owning one’s “ontological guilt.” This form of responsibility is angst, choosing to be “in uncanniness.” See Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard*, 275.

called into question, and this questioning originates with a concomitant valuing of the author(s) and the discourse into which she invites us.

Reading is that form of imaginative reflection whereby we may explicitly name our beliefs in the poetic creation of identity through an encounter with another human being and that language that founds both self and others. In this sense, the text is indeed full of what we bring to it, but the power of literary art, especially sacred texts, is revealed in that it draws such explicit reflection from us, even if that reflection is inauthentic and closes in on itself by simply affirming propositional beliefs as the meaning of the text. The decision to assert dogmatically the meaning of a text is after all yet another free decision, one that a text itself can indeed question. That the text is defenseless before the reader's manipulation of it in inauthentic reading led Plato (given his own metaphysical assumptions about language and truth) to blame the text itself as less "present," less real, and less truthful than voice, a stance which Derrida nicely dismantles. Plato claims in the *Phaedrus* that texts can neither be asked nor answer questions of clarification, that this is the natural result of writing (and being a good disciple of Socrates and the value of dialectic, he condemns writing for just this reason).⁵⁴ A text simply remains the language it is, and yet this resoluteness of the text can itself urge us to re-read, to re-examine the text, continuously creating meaning, ultimately giving readers the chance to hear the text as the discourse it always is. Our poesis of beliefs concerning the text is thus always a poesis of self, even though this may not be the explicit purpose of the text; however, this purpose is often apparent in sacred texts.

⁵⁴275-276a.

In constructing beliefs through reading, the self is finding its grammar as it were, constructing an identity. Through memory, re-reading a text, or even reading something new, we can reflect further on this poiesis of self, think about what might have “caused” our beliefs, but our primary engagement with the text is a kind of helpless falling into the audience of another person—we will inevitably create a meaning for the text and ourselves, and the “reasons” for that meaning arise with our own poetic activity. Such meaning cannot remain stable, as theories of propositional beliefs make them appear to be. That unique mode of being known as reading grants us a dramatic context which the imagination infuses with emotion and memory, and that allows us to construct a self-identity that always contains the danger of its own deconstruction, even if such erosion of the subject-ego (Heidegger’s “they-self”) never occurs or is ignored. This poiesis of belief and meaning is ultimately grounded in a different notion of the ineffable—not as something that defies all description, as if describing or predicating properties were the sole function of discourse, but unspeakable by the self alone.⁵⁵ We must first listen to a language that is not our own, the reaching out of another’s imagination that offers us the possibility of meaning. This language simply calls to us, and if we respond authentically, we begin the poiesis of an authentic self, constructing meaning from what previously silenced us.

⁵⁵Hogan takes a far more nihilistic view of the ineffable. He assumes that human beings are individual consciousnesses “ontologically unable” to communicate with one another. See Hogan, “Literature, God, and the Unbearable Solitude of Consciousness,” 118. Hodges hints at something a bit more hopeful: “In fact it might be *argued* that such an experience of the radically limited character of human meaning is just the experience that *funds* an awareness of the divine.” See Michael P. Hodges, “Faith: Themes from Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche,” in *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis (New York: Routledge, 2004), 80.

Part IV: Sacred Texts and Reflective Reading

[A]rt is a way of forgiving the world for its evil and chaos.

Leszek Kołakowski

Where understanding and desire end, there is darkness, and there God shines.

Meister Eckhart, Predigt 42

1. God and the imagination are one. 2. The thing imagined is the imaginer. The second equals the thing imagined and the imaginer are one. Hence, I suppose, the imaginer is God.

Wallace Stevens

In this final section, I will discuss meaning-creation and the poesis of belief as it arises in the context of reading religious or sacred texts. Someone could, for example, fully endorse my explanation of how meaning is constructed for “normal” texts while simultaneously denying that such is the process for religious texts, claiming that such texts do not call themselves and their explicitly stated beliefs into question, for this would erode the very idea of a religious text as a validation or source of an ethical system. But we must beware exempting a text, any text, from the language game. In general, what sets a religious text apart from other texts is not its being outside the language game but its putative authority on the nature of all existence, especially on what amounts to “good” or “correct” human behavior, moral and ethical ideals transmitted through explicitly value-laden language. From the point of view of a religionist, sacred texts are an inherent part of living, in particular, a way of uncovering the moral dimension of life. Hence the complexity of the religious text: unlike most other literary art, the sacred text most often does contain easily identifiable value assessments, clearly expressing desirable and undesirable behaviors. These assertions cannot be overlooked or ignored: they are clearly

visible within the text itself. In this sense then, religious texts do not call themselves into question and can be seen to assume their own authority to assert propositions with putative universal validity (an aspect of sacred literature we could say is as identifiable as plot in a novel). The religious text does indeed show itself to be authoritative and permits the possibility for a “believer” to identify certain portions of the text as a description of (or unquestionable command to adopt) her own (sanctioned) behavior.⁵⁶ But we are now in a position to see that if the nature of discourse (and therefore texts) is not merely to describe or convey information, then the choice to read the text this way remains just that: a choice. One can go further and claim that such a choice is in error, not because of a putative hermeneutical problem in determining how a believer’s actions should correspond to the text or what the action or belief described by the text actually is, but because such a valuing of the text and method of reading is precisely an attempt *not* to hear the discourse that is the text. There are indeed propositions identifiable within most if not all religious texts masquerading as universally applicable, but the inexorable authority of such propositions is still something granted by the believer/reader. Approaching a text full of supposedly universally appropriate moral propositions as

⁵⁶Hodges makes much the same point with regard to Christianity: the Bible “does not function as a source of hypotheses to be independently tested. Rather it is authoritative. The believer does not read the Bible to see if it is true but to discover the truth” (82n6). In Hodges, “Faith: Themes from Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche.” The problem with such a statement is that it implies that meaning for a “believer” can only manifest as coming from the text alone, which seems to imply that “believer” can only signify someone who desires a code of laws. However, finding sacred literature to be authoritative for one’s life does not preclude an authentic poesis of self. Hodges continues by claiming sacred literature contains “dictates,” but that one can ultimately avoid accepting the authority of the text. See 70 and 74-5.

useful and significant to one's own life is its own reading strategy, another form of forging beliefs and creating an identity.⁵⁷

This active search for moral values and moral truth, guidelines for behavior from a putatively authoritative text, is the result of the subject-centered notion of truth that pervades modernity's unquestioning approach to reality. If a reader does not question this indifference to truth, she imputes to (or searches for) her text as its primary importance a list of doctrines or propositional beliefs as opposed to being open to ("hearing") the text in ecstasy (what Heidegger translates literally from the Greek as "standing outside of"), i.e., a recognition of her own being through time. If read inauthentically, the sacred text will grant the illusion that it is interpreting itself, but what the reader encounters is only a mirror of the they-self and its objectification of all other entities. Although this would be outside the range of this dissertation, it is worth contemplating whether mystical or apophatic readings of sacred texts were and are strategies meant to de-objectify the text and turn it back into the living language it is, a language to which one can reply and into which one can disperse. Such reading could potentially serve as a model of what I propose the reading of sacred texts promises us.⁵⁸

⁵⁷However, see Alice Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 50, 60-62, 81, and 217 for a critique of this type of reading strategy. Crary is inspired by J. L. Austin here in proclaiming that no propositions float about without any context, carrying along their unchanging meanings. She uses his work to support her contention that moral propositions are merely "moralizing" and destructive, crippling our imaginative power to deal with various situations. There can be no rules in propositional form that will somehow save us from dealing with particular crises themselves, and to attempt to follow or institute such rules usually results in harm to the self and others.

⁵⁸Michael Sells informs us that "classical Western apophysis" declared "the utterly transcendent is the utterly immanent," and used images of "overflowing" in order not to reify the transcendent. See Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6. At 207-8, he defines "mystical union" as where "subject-object and self-other dichotomies are undone." Louis Roy cites Sallie Krawcheck in explaining how the mystic is in a process of self-transformation and so negates the categories

It is not my purpose to convert someone who passionately believes in the authority and rightness of her text into a doubter of said text, a skeptic or positivist who doubts the truth of language. But to understand that “finding” the meaning in religious texts is a function of desire, imagination, and a response to language and other persons is to view that response as the responsibility of the reader, not the text itself. For example, certain European Christians of the colonial era considered the description of Noah’s son Ham as “dark” coupled with his punishment of exile a reason handed down by God why the enslavement of African peoples was not only legally unassailable, but a moral right and duty. What these Christians regarded as a “logical” argument was upheld by “textual” evidence, as well as by what they considered “empirical” evidence (of the non-technological, and therefore “primitive,” nature of most African societies). Yet it is safe to assume that a fair number of European Christians today would find such an interpretation not only “incorrect” but also abhorrent and entirely evil. The point here is that the “same” text supplies the reasoning for mutually exclusive moral duties, in this case, slavery and abolitionism. Those earlier imperialists had a very clear desire to validate their own principles and with the help of a dark imagination fulfilled that desire, all the while proclaiming that this was indeed not an interpretation but simply the result of reading “God’s word.” And there should be no doubt that they indeed did believe that

of self and other since the mystic’s own self is becoming an other to her. See Louis Roy, *Mystical Consciousness: Western Perspectives and Dialogue with Japanese Thinkers* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 125. Finally, Ricoeur understands prayer as a “response” to a “call” from something beyond the one who prays, and so in praying “consciousness exceeds itself.” See Paul Ricoeur, “Experience and Language in Religious Discourse,” in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, ed. D. Janicaud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 129. I applaud all such descriptions of the self overcoming a materialist ontology, but would want to emphasize that the sacrality of response, of reading, does not have to entail typical metaphysical hierarchies of a “great chain of Being.”

their interpretation was simply the result of reading, that this was not some form of imperial conspiracy theory and “noble lie” to tell the Christian masses in order to make slavery a continuing, palatable possibility. Yet such lightless reasoning would never have been possible without the text itself, regardless of what we may think of such readers. To put it another way, the imperialist is indeed responding to the text by reading her worldview into it, but then refrains from holding herself responsible for her interpretation and instead makes the text “responsible” for her worldview. Any clear case of eisegesis is certainly a form of inauthentic reading, but what if the biblical text had explicitly stated that certain peoples should be regarded as less than human? Here, too, the reader “enacts” her response to the text and does not escape from the task of forming a meaning. To submit to the authority of the text, therefore, is also the responsibility of the reader, and the thoughtless (in the Heideggerian sense) obeying of a moral code or doctrine found within the text does not somehow relieve that responsibility and validate one’s behavior or thinking as sanctioned or “caused” by the text.

Although I am claiming here that a cultural value or belief was imposed on the text, the text itself supplied the context for a discussion of beliefs, the explicit reflection on cultural norms. It is this process of reflection that is equivalent to the process of “making” our beliefs, though again I must reiterate that all metaphors of “building” beliefs are somewhat misleading in that they seem to imply that beliefs have an ultimate ground on which they rest and from which rational steps are taken, all to the effect that most beliefs present themselves as if held by a reasonable person and, if understood as propositions, are at least theoretically if not practically universally valid for all people in

every time and place.⁵⁹ This “reasonableness” is indeed part of the grammar of belief, it is how we discuss beliefs of a religious nature, yet in the spirit of Wittgenstein we must say that the ground of religious belief is no surer than the ground of the language game itself. Both are ultimately groundless, yet both also have the unique role of asserting foundations around which all other “propositions” rotate.

Such inauthentic reading strategies often secure a system of beliefs by employing an opposition between “literal” and “metaphorical” interpretations of those texts. Such a reading strategy is exemplified (as pointed out in the introduction) by Marcus Borg.⁶⁰ As Borg’s own writing suggests, these terms begin to take on a certain gravity and become shorthand for a systematic approach to the reading and interpretation of religious texts. To demand that a piece of text be taken “literally” is actually to endorse one interpretation or belief as having better authority than another based on what Borg calls “fact” or “history” (or alternatively, the distinction is used simply to ignore what others consider

⁵⁹William James’ criticism of the rationalization of beliefs is well known. See for example William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Penguin Classics, 1985), 73, 428, and 518. The two latter citations show James’ own belief in how new meanings give rise to new worlds, a transformation of person and culture.

⁶⁰To cite the same example, see Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 69. Mark Burrows is similar to Borg in calling for a “poetic approach to the biblical text,” but via the more ancient art of analogical reading (169). His primary relationship, however, is between reader and text, not reader and author. He also asserts that a thing “contains” meanings and supports the idea that the nature of language is metaphor. See Mark S. Burrows, “‘to Taste with the Heart’: Allegory, Poetics, and the Deep Reading of Scripture,” *Interpretation* 56, no. 2 (2002): 169-72, 175. The concept of language as metaphor goes deep. Thinkers as opposed as Quine (who accepts that we learn via metaphor) and Eco (who claims that language “needs” metaphors just to name objects) accept it. See W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 15 and Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 101. David Stern, however, criticizes the philosopher’s notion of analogy: “The analogy is not a means to an otherwise inexpressible truth; rather, the conviction that the analogy points to an inexpressible truth is itself a product of the analogy’s hold over the philosopher. In seeing how that came about, one sees not only how the analogy misled us but also how it concealed itself.” See David G. Stern, *Wittgenstein on Mind and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31.

doctrine by labeling it “mere” fact). Such a stipulation of course entails ontological assumptions of what counts as a fact, as real, and underwrites the epistemological relation to world as the primary relation by which truth is measured. But as Borg’s analysis of biblical texts reveals, even he oscillates between interpreting the text metaphorically and literally, depending on the verses at issue. This alternation immediately makes his approach suspect, since it appears rather arbitrary why one piece of text should be metaphorical and another simply literal. Yet he himself gives us the reason: those parts of the Bible that he wants to find valid today, to have significance for contemporary society, are saved from the trash-heap of history through metaphorical interpretation. In doing so, he can retrieve them from their particular historical context and bring them into ours. Such passages are transcendental, not in Heidegger’s sense, but in the typical metaphysical sense of being absolute truths outside all history and context. In this way, Borg maintains that the Bible has absolute authority, by locating that authority in a realm he considers unable to be described factually or historically, but hinted at only via metaphor. But these beliefs remain beyond critique, are immutable, and do not involve much originality, even though Borg wants us to rely on a “poetic” sense of language versus an empirical one. Regarding other aspects of the Bible, those passages that Borg is comfortable seeing as historical information only, he interprets “literally.” Yet, as previously discussed in chapter 3, Heidegger makes clear that interpreting metaphorically (or literally) is itself a hermeneutic strategy based on metaphysical concepts of language and reality.

Borg, and readers like him, assume that meaning presents itself, that literalness and metaphoricity make themselves apparent via some unfailing linguistic formula that always validates what they already believe. While it is perfectly appropriate to use the text to *identify* metaphors, similes, and other various tropes, I hope I have shown throughout this chapter that language and therefore meaning is not metaphorical in nature (words and sentences do not acquire meaning via correspondence to an object, there is no “carrying over” of meaning to a word). While there are certainly contexts where it makes sense to admonish a reader not to take something literally, it is a violation of the nature of language and texts to say that literalism or metaphoricity should themselves be reading strategies. Not only are both compromised by having to answer a prior ontological question as to what can count as the “real” or history, but both still ultimately lay claim to a theory of meaning where language is purely referential and words have meaning because of their correspondence to objects or reference to a concept; language never really speaks in the Heideggerian sense. The reader’s task according to such strategies is simply to identify correctly when to use literalism and metaphoricity, and meaning will construct itself from the text, as it were. The goal of such strategies is the sanctioning of certain beliefs and certain interpretations, not the sharing of language and the constant attention it needs for the construction of meaning, which I have been attempting to demonstrate throughout this chapter.

If we overcome the modern obsession with propositional beliefs and its concomitant fear of an authentic poesis of self, we can come to see sacred literature as the art it is—an explicit calling of the self into question. Sacred texts do not take the self

for granted, but explicitly critique it, and in so doing offer the reader a reflection on poiesis itself. In the constant exercise of the hermeneutical imagination, of reading any literary work of art, the unceasing activity of understanding language through encounters with others, we are exercising our humanity. Authentic reading guarantees nothing but risks all, and literature, by keeping us in question, helps us along that path of authentic discourse in the human community, something that is indeed invaluable and profound. Those who fail to respond to the literary work of art, the sacred text, by the constant questioning and reconstruction of beliefs and self are indeed missing an essential human practice and closing a door to their happiness.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Everyday Mystical

A book must be an axe for the frozen sea within us.

Franz Kafka

The illumination of the world is my constant possibility.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Part I. The Hermeneutics of Reading

In this final chapter, I will bring together the concepts of freedom, responsibility, and beliefs, demonstrating that understanding reading to be best explained as the adoption of a worldview is a direct consequence of metaphysical thinking that is in itself antithetical to a more subtle notion of freedom, i.e., the Heideggerian concept of freedom that denies it to be first and foremost a human property. Authentic reading allows us to question this primary metaphysical assumption, namely that one's views are the result of certain beliefs and can be summarized as the content of those beliefs, which is to find the basis for Being in a purely mental mechanism, that everything (including Being itself) can be reduced to propositions, logical or otherwise. If we understand instead that beliefs are *made* by us and subject to change, that they are the result of events and encounters and are therefore contextualized, our view of who we are changes—we are the makers of ourselves, not the product of immaterial, unconscious, determinative, or behavioral programs entered into the “mind/body matrix” via some medium, the latter usually being language understood as a code of some sort. If we reject our responsibility for poiesis,

however, we come to think that our beliefs and values somehow structure the world or, conversely, are structured by the world, through an epistemological relationship (e.g., “I think x because I believe y” or “I believe y because I know x”). As Heidegger so perspicuously demonstrates, understanding Being through worldviews affirms and is affirmed by the subject-object duality and its concomitant representational thinking.

As we saw in chapter 2, Wittgenstein also demonstrates how our modern obsession with causation helps us to misconceive language as being primarily descriptive or propositional in nature. The setting of already held beliefs into the text is antithetical to possibility and the poetic activity of the imagination, and ultimately destroys our ability to hear the call of the text—holding to such propositions means not understanding the self to be in the mode of becoming, and this type of reader’s final demand is for an absolute meaning, an orthodox interpretation.¹ If, however, we become sensitive to the literary work of art as a work of truth, to the concept of truth as uncovering, and to language as an unfolding of being wherein meaning is equivalent to use, then we come to realize that whatever beliefs we have as a result of reading, especially after reading a sacred text, are instead purely our own poetic response that must always be called into question by the text and by ourselves if reading is to remain authentic. The ego-subject is therefore constantly dismantled in authentic reading, and the full realization of our own unceasing

¹Leszek Kołakowski accepts the inevitability of forming values, but considers them to be the product of needs and always “tending to disappear” since they are, in one sense, humans themselves, who of course die. He also warns against fossilizing values: “What we know for certain is that in maintaining any kind of human fellowship we need a faith in ready-made and nonarbitrary values, and that at the same time it is dangerous to believe that these values are at any time fixed and completed, that they can relieve one of situational interpretations and a situational responsibility for them. A mythology can be socially fruitful only when it is unceasingly suspect” (105). See Leszek Kołakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, trans. Adam Czerniawski (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3 and 105.

becoming returns us to a sense of wonder, the sacred awe so often encountered in the reading of religious texts.

As described in chapter 3, this reconsideration of the nature of discourse, meaning, and self directly bears on our concept of truth. Revisiting briefly Heidegger's notion of truth, human beings are brought face-to-face with entities through the disclosure of language, such disclosure being the "ground" or "essence" of truth.² Heidegger claims that this idea of truth is that which makes presupposition itself possible, which in turn shows us that our "ownmost potentiality-for-Being" is an "issue for us."³ Transferring this concept of truth as unhiddenness to the context of the imagination, the very possibility of imagining different scenarios (possibilities or situations) depends on our disclosing the truth as an ontological structure. It is only because we disclose and reveal entities in their truth that something like possibility can exist for us. Regarding the hermeneutics of reading, whatever beliefs we form from our engagement with texts are the products of such an imaginative framework, of seeing possibilities only through the interaction with the text, possibilities that may have lain hidden otherwise.

So far, we can say that the hermeneutics of reading has shown us that the text is a form of discourse, that meaning is the imaginative response of the reader to this discourse, and that the imposition of worldviews or beliefs onto the text, whether or not those beliefs are perceived to be "caused" by reading the text, is the antithesis of authentic reading. We are left to explain the positive impact the authentic reading of texts holds for

²*BT* 270.

³*Ibid.*

us. First, however, we should review the roles texts play within communities when reading is inauthentic and the construction of meaning poorly understood.

As we have seen previously, a thinker like Frege, in his objectification of language and his need to secure reference as the key to meaning, simply relegates great literary works of art to the function of mere emotional outlet, of stirring the feelings. Frege and thinkers like him believe they are doing nothing more than echoing Aristotle's contention in *Poetics* that literary art, drama or epic in Aristotle's case, is primarily functional, i.e., it serves as a catharsis of the person (or soul, in Aristotle's Greek)—which process, for Aristotle, was only one function of literature and far more involved than Frege, who understands catharsis rather simplistically, seems to think.⁴ Although a psychic purification may be one effect of reading, to say that this is what is essential about reading and authoring texts is to make texts inessential, nothing more than a bit of therapy when the need arises. In addition to the text-as-therapy approach, easily identifiable moral or ethical values within certain forms of literature, e.g., fables or parables, pose a danger for those readers who overlay the text with a particular worldview in hopes of finding its meaning. A reader who only understands herself in the mode of a subject is forced to read through the imposition of the indifferent self, i.e., propositional beliefs, a reading practice that results in the world and perspective of the text being reduced to gist, to paraphrase, a one or two-line slogan that functions as proverb, axiom,

⁴Robert Eaglestone criticizes those whom he calls "neo-Aristotelians" for making exactly this assumption about their texts. He says that such readers believe too much in the "realist" power of art, that is, its "mimetic" power. To do so is to "reduce" art to "philosophy," to a "corrective." Narration makes life appear to be a "false unity" by making it appear to be a "holistic lesson" when it is no such thing. See Robert Eaglestone, "One and the Same? Ethics, Aesthetics, and Truth," *Poetics Today* 25, no. 4 (2004): 602-604.

or epigraph. In other words, those texts that indeed do wish to make clear a “moral” to their readers (and this can often include sacred texts) can only effectively do so by engaging the reader’s imagination, and any reduction of the text that effectively bypasses the practice of reading is a rejection of poiesis, even if the reader is “correct” in identifying the moral of the story. The world of the text is destroyed, its essential integrity disrupted, and its power as a window on Being and beings, as artwork, is hidden. The text is shrunk to fit the form of a mere tool, something ready-to-hand, and so its truth is denied it. Instead, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, the truth is now seen as something outside the text, outside the entities, encapsulated in beliefs that measure reality according to some calculus of goodness or worth. Reading becomes nothing more than a search for the author’s “message,” the author’s beliefs, and the primary function of reading becomes whether we as readers can or should agree with those beliefs. The worth of the text becomes dependent on whether we can agree with the putative beliefs in the text, and the text no longer says anything to us. The overall effect of assigning this kind of role to reading is a blinding of the reader to her own hand in the text, the creation and maintaining of meaning that does not rest in any way *in* the discourse that is the text. In seeing the text as nothing more than the repository and advertisement of certain beliefs, the reader can deny her responsibility for constructing her own beliefs with regard to the text, either asserting that the text “caused” her to believe certain things, or to deny the text any validity since what it says cannot be conformed to the pre-determined interpretative framework of the reader.

The view of reading I am promoting throughout this dissertation denies that what is essential to the literary work of art is its “functional” role, for all such reductionism to roles (moral didacticism; dissemination of dogma, values, beliefs; emotional purging; entertainment; information gathering) robs from the literary work of art its status as art, as another’s imaginative engagement with Being.⁵ More precisely, this reductionism is itself the product of a technological orientation to Being, since surely there are texts the purpose of which is to disseminate certain beliefs. Only by denying the responsibility of the reader does one assert that the divining of such a purpose, what could be called authorial intent, even if correct, exhausts the meaning of the text. Thinking functionalism to be the essence of language and text reduces text and author(s) to the status of tool, and automatically relegates the reader to the status of subject, the “indifferent I.” In short, “functional” reading is technologized reading, reading understood as a cognitive mechanism to accomplish some other task. What becomes hidden is both our own and the author’s humanity, for the text is not seen as the possibility for self-poiesis but a confrontation between subjects, or between subjects and objects. The authentic human response to the text, however, results in a plurality of voices, not a function or univocal purpose, a multiplicity of readings and a multiplicity of meanings. The work of art remains the work that it is, and authentic reading preserves the text as that work.

⁵John Wall, in an attempt to elevate the role of imagination in everyday life, in my opinion reduces it to a moralizing and didactic instrument: “Imagination should not be conceptualized as an end in itself, but as a detour on the way toward the re-creation of social relations.” See John Wall, “The Creative Imperative: Religious Ethics and the Formation of Life in Common,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2005): 58.

But the claim that there is a necessary connection between the stability of the work and the stability of interpretation (orthodoxy of interpretation) is ungrounded—there is no necessity, logical or otherwise, for this connection, and it only seems to be necessary in the first place if we hold to a theory of reference (the text is assumed to refer to or represent some other thing, therefore its meaning is secured by describing what that other thing is, thereby marking it off from all other things). If we understand the literary work of art to be the very dis-covery of truth of Dasein, as an offering of this truth and not a form of mediation or reference, this felt need of orthodox interpretation disappears. The text is affirmed by the multiplicity of interpretations, not weakened by it, and authentic reading recognizes this quality of the text to individualize us, to allow each of us a unique, poetic response to another’s discourse.⁶

The inauthentic self, however, considers itself to be the result of certain beliefs and views, in short, as what Heidegger names the they-self. But there is a seeming safety in retreating to the they-self, for there is fragility in authentic poiesis. The responsibility of our own poiesis is embedded in our very being, and through our response to others we have the opportunity to see that freedom is not a function of the will of a subject but is part of the structure of beings as beings. Only the technological understanding of Being

⁶Paul Ricoeur argues that the “revealed” word “manifests” as scripture, but that scripture itself still depends on a “hidden” word. The text’s “meaning,” then, may in fact be all the traditions that arise from it. As such, scripture is akin to a “library” or “polyphony.” See Paul Ricoeur, “Experience and Language in Religious Discourse,” in *Phenomenology and the Theological Turn: The French Debate*, ed. D. Janicaud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 133 and 143. Kevin Hart makes a similar claim for the plurality and openness of religious beliefs: “An experience of God is never altogether closed because even the slightest encounter with the divinity yields endless meditation and endless prompts to action in the world.” For Hart, “to remain open to meditation” is to “experience language.” See Kevin Hart, “‘The Experience of Nonexperience,’” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 201-2.

makes it seem that beings are within our grasp and respond to our desire, yet it is precisely in their seeming obedience that they escape us and we lose our chance to understand them authentically. If we refrain from the desire to “possess” the text in this way, we are left to our selves, and the responsibility of creating those very selves. Even in the practice of authentic reading, we may indeed be blind to other possibilities of meaning within the text, but this is no different from any other point in our existence as we maintain ourselves in anticipation of a future. Realizing one’s own blindness to possibilities is to remove oneself from the everyday notion of comfort and to conceive of reading as a practice that does not find its foundation in a grasping that makes of subjectivity a master of Being. Rather, we find the act of reading to be as tangible, fragile, and risky as our own existence, our meanings and beliefs able to recede from us and change no matter how tightly we might wish to hold them.

Part II. Reading and Ethics

Understood as poetic activity, reading reveals an ethical structure in that how we choose to read reveals how we choose to interact with others.⁷ That is, authentic reading

⁷Cora Diamond has an interesting view of ethics, given that she takes the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* seriously in claiming that all ethical language is “nonsense.” She argues that the imagination is necessary in order to imagine a “place” where this nonsense might make sense, for example, in a fairy tale, and that any “empirical” investigation destroys the ethical. She understands the *Tractatus* to be one entire work of such “philosophical” nonsense that only makes sense if read imaginatively. See Cora Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination, and the Method of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*,” in *The New Wittgenstein*, ed. Alice Crary and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), especially 158-9 and 168. Regina Schwartz believes that an ethical response requires mystery, an unknowing: “The restoration of invisibility to what had been imagined as transparent to understanding and to use, is necessary for an ethical response to the other.” Her admonition here against instrumentalism or utilitarianism is reminiscent of Heidegger and the direction I lean toward. See Regina M. Schwartz, “From Ritual to Poetry: Herbert’s Mystical Eucharist,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Michael Kessler and Christian Sheppard (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 158. In a completely different vein, William Schweiker attacks philosophical concepts of ethics in favor of “theological” ethics. He first defines the good as “linked with, if not limited to, what respects and enhances the integrity of a being’s life in relation to others” (539n1), claiming such a concept

can itself be considered ethical “conduct,” regardless of whatever moral or didactic content the text may have. Identifying the “ethical content” of beliefs, values, or “themes” in a text, especially a sacred text, is therefore not the primary focus of authentic reading. To put it another way, comparing propositions or doctrines found “within” or formed from a text in no way leads us to any substantial understanding of ethics, nor does it help resolve any dispute over the “ethics” of interpretation.⁸

Heidegger’s re-envisioning of truth helps us understand why any notion of ethics as well-formed propositions or beliefs does not grasp the ethical structure of authentic reading. As we saw in chapter 3, his essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” focuses primarily on the origin of the idea that truth must be equivalent to correctness. Toward the end of this piece, Heidegger makes the startling claim that this revolution in the conception and location of truth leads Plato, and all of Plato’s descendants in the Western metaphysical tradition, to consider truth to be something beyond beings (meta-physics), and that this in

of the good is “humanist” whereas someone like Heidegger is an anti-humanist: “[Heidegger] puzzled over the ontological meaning of human action in his ‘Letter on Humanism,’ seemingly more worried about the fate of Being than the blood of innocent people” (540). Schweiker also cites Heidegger’s notion of *das Man* as an attack on the “common person.” He continues, arguing that antihumanists believe that “transhuman realities devoid of moral purpose or meaning will nevertheless save us” (545) and that “after gas chambers and killing fields, who honestly believes that objective Geist or the fate of Being will save us?” (555). The majority of his comments cause me to think that Schweiker has not read Heidegger closely or well. For example, Schweiker admits that “overhumanization” leads to technologization of our environment, which leads to dehumanization, but it takes him to page 549 to grudgingly confess that Heidegger has said all this before and that other thinkers believe Heidegger not to be an antihumanist, but describing a new kind of humanism. One of Schweiker’s last comments on the notion of freedom is also reminiscent of Heidegger, though his own idea of freedom is vastly different from Heidegger’s: “Freedom must be measured by a good that is not of its making” (558). See William Schweiker, “Theological Ethics and the Question of Humanism,” *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 4 (2003): 539n1, 540, 543, 545, 549, 555, and 558.

⁸Louis Wolcher sums up this notion nicely: “All the insight in the world is useless to us unless we live insightfully.” In other words, we do not have to “possess” intellectual insights (but maybe be them?). See Louis E. Wolcher, “The Third Mountain: A Meditation on Chaos and Order,” *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 15, no. 1 (2002): 49.

turn leads to the “measuring” of reality according to values and beliefs.⁹ Heidegger’s thought on the connection between a metaphysical understanding of truth and the creation of values or beliefs can be used to describe the darker, ideological orientation one can have toward texts. We can read in such a way, we can engage others in such a way, that the text becomes invisible, is effectively erased in favor of the adoption of certain beliefs, to the point where we defend these beliefs as if they originated outside ourselves (the text as cause) and not as imaginative constructs of our own.¹⁰ In so doing, we seem to elevate the status of the text, but in essence we have usurped the text and made it subject to ourselves by silencing the author(s). No authentic ethical interaction with others can occur if such is our approach to reading.

On the contrary, the ethical response to others is made possible by encountering persons as distinct selves, in the present context, by being receptive to the text. In so doing, the reader finds her self lacking, incomplete, and gives herself no opportunity to measure others against a self assumed to be stable, transparent, and perfected. There is no room to simply judge or merely tolerate others, for the reader’s focus is now a poiesis through the text—the author is needful to the reader’s self, but not in the way food or a personal attribute is needful, i.e., in such a way that it can be placed in reserve and effectively overlooked. The practice of authentic reading permits us to understand that

⁹Martin Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 182. See also the relevant sections of chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁰Such is the account of moralizing that Alice Crary takes to task throughout her book on moral judgments. Her basic argument, as mentioned in chapter 2, is that morality is possible without moralizing propositions. Czeslaw Milosz links moralizing with its concomitant rules, punishments, and fatalism with a loss of hope: “[W]here there is no tomorrow, moralizing makes its entrance.” See Czeslaw Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 15.

the text is a constant call that shapes us in our response to it. The text must be closely attended to, contemplated, revisited, and can never be absent if self-poiesis is to occur. The authentic creation of beliefs and meaning is not a focus on the self to the exclusion of the author's discourse-text, but is a practice made possible only by its inclusion. The authentic self is that response to the text that follows authentic reading.

On a perhaps more practical or everyday level, grounding ethics in this way affects how we discuss or learn from literary works of art. When the need or desire for dogmatic, orthodox interpretations completely disappears, the reader effortlessly opens herself to the polysemous nature of language and texts. Various interpretations and meanings of a text become the norm, as well as a concomitant respect for each individual reader. The reader now has a genuine desire to enter into dialogue with other readers, other selves, in order to learn alternative paths of poetic possibility, for she is well aware that her own meaning-creation is intensely personal in the sense of person-making, that she does not and cannot have a neutral or "purely" objective view of the text that supposedly exhausts its meaning. Such respect for others in general, here specifically for the literary work of art that is another's discourse, and for other readers promotes genuine tolerance, which is not mere acceptance or silence in the face of another self's poiesis, but a caring interaction with that other self in hopes of authentic learning and further imaginative self-creation.

However, the focus of this dissertation is not ethics, and this small section can only serve as an indicator of the complex associations between reading and ethics. Much work could still be completed in this area, especially a deepening of our understanding of

the being of reading and the entities (reader-preservers and author-artists) it discloses.

Merleau-Ponty's work on the embodied and bodily imagination is rich ground from which to begin in this regard, for it reminds us that reading understood as an engagement with another through discourse, and also as the poiesis of self and beliefs, is not simply the working of a mind or a purely mental phenomenon. Reading too has its bodily aspect, its postures, its emotions, its visions. Only a more complete ontological understanding of embodied reading will help us explore the possibility of a "redemptive" reading, that reading that binds and heals individual readers, that makes explicit our Being-with-others.

Part III. Reading, Self, and Beliefs

Authentic reading, then, enacts our being responsible for every belief, every value, every meaning that we produce. Although saying such may make Sartre's theory of consciousness seem amenable to authentic reading,¹¹ it is important to note that reading so understood does not conform to typical ways consciousness is understood, including Sartre's. As we saw at the end of Heidegger's essay on Plato's theory of truth, judging everything according to values and beliefs is the direct result of dislocating truth from entities and locating it instead in the relation between humans and those entities, particularly the correct relationship that should hold and guide how one behaves toward them. Heidegger's criticism of Sartre in the "Letter on 'Humanism'" reveals that many if not all theories of consciousness are also results of this dislocation. Sartre assumes that

¹¹In *BN* 796, Sartre condemns the "spirit of seriousness" for causing us to believe that transcendent values exist and that objects are desirable in themselves, i.e., that the in-itself has a value that we need to recognize. Such thinking is antithetical to his claim that we in our "anguish" are the source of our desires, and therefore to avoid bad faith is to embrace that anguish, our responsibility for whatever values we find in the world.

the subjectivity of consciousness is automatically given to forming values, and indeed says as much in his section on lack.¹² Heidegger would of course question the assumption that the formation of values or propositional beliefs is a “natural” (in the sense of “essential”) function of the For-Itself, for he not only locates the essence of truth in Dasein’s revelatory nature but also implies that the idea of understanding Being via a set of beliefs or worldviews is a historical invention whose genesis is in Plato’s philosophy. Any notion of a Cartesian ego or subject is therefore called into question by authentic reading, which also deconstructs theories of consciousness that force on us a duality of subjects and objects (as well as the duality of the subject to itself, i.e., self-consciousness) and a form of mediation between them that such duality immediately begs for.

As explained in the previous section, an authentic self is made possible through interaction and care for others. The practice of authentic reading, which is contemplative and in essence a form of meditation, calls to mind an image of flux or a continuum as opposed to that of a subject-object duality with its portrayal of carefully bounded and defined identities. Through such a practice, self and others do not somehow have to be forced together or connected. Reminding ourselves briefly of Heidegger’s notion of world as discussed in chapter 3, the world is not some separate thing over against Dasein, but on the contrary, world and Dasein arise together. So too do reader and text, self and

¹²See, for example, *BN* 146 and 796-8. However, at 225, Sartre offers us the merest possibility of critiquing the idea of imposing values on a text in that to do so, the reader must posit herself as reading, as remembering how she felt at a certain point in the reading process. As Sartre explains, reflecting on the self is bad faith, for it divides self from self, making the reflected-on self an in-itself, which consciousness can never be.

others, arise together, without need of being placed in proximity to one another, i.e., the relationship between the two already exists. The authentic self comes to self-understanding through its world and communication with others by gathering up the strands of its dispersed I (the inauthentic self that only grasps itself as subject, as the “they”) and emptying itself of this indifference. Such kenosis clears the space for receptivity, for listening to others, an authentic hearing of the text. It can be concluded that the authentic self is not an identity or a self-determined entity, but a continuous emptying and filling, a self-poiesis made possible through communicating with others, an embodiment of the dis-covery and disclosure of language.

The desire to listen to others and create meaning is at heart a desire to “learn” the self, others, and world, and in so doing transcend the indifferent I and *das Man* by caring for those others and the world, as discussed in the previous section. This ontological understanding of texts, meaning, and self, i.e., of learning, has an ontic aspect, namely that learning is reenvisioned authentically as becoming a self, not as the acquisition of facts that leads to either the correct representation of or correct attribution of properties to objects, nor as the reduction of personal experiences to particular values and beliefs. One can of course learn facts, properties, and attributes, and one does of course learn from one’s “mistakes” and experiences, often reducing them in the process to a list of values or beliefs, but the essence of learning is not the storing up of such facts and beliefs, even if such storing up is inevitable.

Authentic learning cannot then be reduced to the technological, to the calculable, i.e., to an epistemological relationship, but is instead the growth and love of wisdom,

namely a clearing of the self that can only result in a desire to learn more, the recognition that poiesis is never complete or perfectible. It is “knowing” that one can never “know” enough or even “knows” anything at all; alternatively, it is realizing that to “know” oneself is the most desirable form of “knowledge.” Authentic reading is that meditative practice in search of authentic learning, a practice that demands exercising the imagination as we create meaning from the literary work of art.

Such an understanding of learning helps us evade the assumed paradox of learning, briefly put, that one must already “know” the object of inquiry in order to “know” that what one learns is both “true” and associated with its intended object. No precondition for learning, e.g., anamnesis, is necessary once we understand that Being and beings are always “present” to us, that learning is not reducible to facts and beliefs, but is a listening that draws near. It is the dis-covery of beings as the beings that they are, which are never fully graspable or calculable, but a cause for wonder. Such wonder helps create the authentic self, engenders more desire to further learn and shelter beings, and expands the imagination. Authentic reading is authentic learning, and the text becomes a source of joy, allowing us to say with Einstein that “imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Part IV: Sacred Texts and the Hermeneutics of Reading

The connection between beliefs and reading religious texts is of course a complex one, but the hermeneutics of reading can reveal much to us in this regard.¹³ Sacred texts

¹³Richard Amesbury points out that contradictions between two groups can occur only if both share “a common epistemic practice” and occupy “a common logical space” (45). So, for example, a believer in God and a non-believer cannot contradict each other since they do not share this space. Amesbury goes on

acquire a special status, not in the sense of becoming a genre, as if there were an easily recognized and solidly bounded area of literature called “sacred texts,” but in how they are approached by certain readers. I must stress not all readers, for the texts of any religious group can be read by some “merely” as literature, as one narrative amongst others.¹⁴ It is this division of readers that gives rise to a pernicious debate regarding the

to argue that there is no “neutral set of criteria” whereby one can test divergent views, that religious beliefs are “the contexts within which the distinction between true and false descriptions of reality can meaningfully be applied.” See Richard Amesbury, “Has Wittgenstein Been Misunderstood by Wittgensteinian Philosophers of Religion?” *Philosophical Investigations* 26, no. 1 (2003): 45. Edward Berryman calls religious belief “a pragmatic resource whose configuration is shaped to allow the accomplishment of interactional moves within specific contexts” (15). It seems to me that this way of understanding beliefs makes them a worldview for accomplishing certain goals, much like the structuralist interpretation of religion. See Edward Berryman, “Belief, Apparitions, and Rationality: The Social Scientific Study of Religion after Wittgenstein,” *Human Studies: A Journal for Philosophy and the Social Sciences* 28, no. 1 (2005): 15. Emyr Thomas argues that those theorists who consider religious beliefs only able to be described are making too strong a division between the religious practice itself and beliefs concerning those practices as described by the practitioners. He claims that this inhibits a genuine understanding of belief because practices often need beliefs about something in order to be coherent in themselves. Although Thomas makes a good point against descriptive theorists of religion, he seems to remain in the “mentalist” mode of belief as a way to structure Being, as discussed above. See Emyr Vaughan Thomas, “Wittgensteinian Methodology and Religious Belief,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1999): 268-9. John Whittaker claims that what a belief is about is not what distinguishes religious from “scientific” belief, but that “sometimes the affirmation of a belief *simultaneously includes* a change in practice” (468, original italics). He further argues that we are “trained” in certain beliefs such that they become the practice and are not “logically prior” to it. Yet I doubt Wittgenstein would be sympathetic towards this behaviorist approach. See John H. Whittaker, “Belief, Practice, and Grammatical Understanding,” *Faith and Philosophy* 18, no. 4 (2001): 467-8 and 470. D. Z. Phillips explains religious belief this way: “To say that God is in the picture, is not to say that it is a picture of God. To believe in the truth of such a picture is to adopt what it says as one’s norm of truth. To say God is in the picture is a confession of faith” (44). He goes on to argue that to separate beliefs from their contexts, as realists wish to do, results in a “synonymy of belief,” that is, the same conclusion is reached through what are obviously extremely different beliefs (to use his example, as in feeling peaceful because of one’s belief in God or feeling peaceful through one’s use of drugs). The realist, committed to such a division, does not “take seriously” religious beliefs, but reduces them as much as the non-realist does. Phillips’ final analysis is that “realists are foundationalists, for whom beliefs never yield certainty. Belief is a second best to knowledge” (53). Realism totally eviscerates religious beliefs. See Dewi Z. Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 44, 46-7, and 53-4.

¹⁴John Coulson raises the issue that all religious belief takes a narrative form that requires imagination: “[W]hat we hold in faith is most frequently expressed in metaphor, symbol, and story, and, as such, prior to and as a condition of its verification, it requires an imaginative assent comparable to that we give to poems and novels” (v). He repeats this thesis throughout his own work, which strikes me as a classical piece of advocating the “suspension of disbelief.” Coulson never seems to question the claims that language is primarily representational, that beliefs are propositional, and that the imagination is somehow nonrational in

validity of religious beliefs, the “insider-outsider” argument, where believers of a certain stripe claim that only believers “truly” understand the religious text at issue and all others do not. In Wittgenstein studies, this argument takes the form of debating whether Wittgenstein was a “fideist,” that is, whether he considered religious beliefs to comprise their own language game and therefore escape any criticism regarding truth, rationality, acceptability, etc.¹⁵ The heart of this debate, of course, is ethics, not so much the texts

that it grants faith without need for proof. Literature in general for Coulson seems to be simply a way to “perpetuate” values. See John Coulson, *Religion and Imagination: 'in Aid of a Grammar of Assent'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), v, 46, and 167-9.

¹⁵Amesbury asserts that Wittgensteinians criticize the claim that one can reject a set of religious beliefs from a “metaphysical” point of view, that is, a putatively “neutral” point of view. A religious practice is rejected from the point of view of another religious practice, and the metaphysical view is not a possibility. This seems to me, however, to be dangerously close to claiming that religions comprise their own language games. See Amesbury, “Has Wittgenstein Been Misunderstood by Wittgensteinian Philosophers of Religion?” 51. Berryman opposes what he calls the “objectivist conception” of religious beliefs, that beliefs are “static,” and one either adheres to them or chooses not to. In other words, he seems to oppose considering beliefs to be propositions. He claims, wrongly I think, that Wittgenstein thought of religious beliefs in this static way. See Berryman, “Belief, Apparitions, and Rationality: The Social Scientific Study of Religion after Wittgenstein,” 19. John Churchill argues that Wittgenstein thought religious beliefs were “regulative,” not the results of tested hypotheses. Although I agree with the latter, Churchill’s Wittgenstein seems to me excessively rule-bound. See John Churchill, “Rat and Mole’s Epiphany of Pan: Wittgenstein on Seeing Aspects and Religious Belief,” *Philosophical Investigations* 21, no. 2 (1998): 162 and 171. Brian Clack opposes those thinkers who ascribe to Wittgenstein a belief that religion either “intensifies” or “releases” certain emotions through “symbolic activity.” Clack argues that such thinkers believe the “primary purpose” of language is to “state facts” and not talk about emotions, who consider “descriptive language” to be unchanging. See Brian R. Clack, “Wittgenstein and Expressive Theories of Religion,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40 (August 1996): 52-3. N. K. Verbin takes a rather interesting view, claiming that most theologians consider certainty to be constitutive of belief, not realizing that doubt is actually constitutive of belief, and Verbin uses Wittgenstein to support this claim. She argues that thinkers like D. Z. Phillips have used Wittgenstein’s thought to support religious beliefs as “framework beliefs,” that is, beliefs that cannot be verified, “justified,” or falsified. But Verbin asserts that because religious beliefs “involve” doubt, they are unlike “foundational” beliefs. Doubt in this case is not “epistemological,” but as she puts it, “conceptual.” Doubt is a “personal crisis” that forces us to think more fully about God, for example, and Verbin makes the analogy with Wittgenstein’s discussion of pain: to say “he is in pain” is “theoretical,” something that can be verified; to say “I am in pain” is not theoretical, but is a unique focus on the person, and Verbin says doubt’s effect on us is similar. Overall, her article seems to point out a weakness of those thinkers like Phillips who seem to take an overtly epistemological approach to understanding Wittgenstein’s thought. See N. K. Verbin, “Uncertainty and Religious Belief,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2002): 1-2, 4, and 8. Phillips does seem to confirm Verbin’s assessment of him by claiming that not all religious beliefs (though some) have the “character” of a “hypothesis”: “the absolute beliefs are the criteria, not the object of assessment” (65). But Phillips denies that Wittgenstein is a fideist, that religion is somehow clearly distinguishable from other “life forms.”

themselves, if texts are even involved. What is at issue is if certain “beliefs” (which of course implies certain actions) are or should be understandable and therefore possibly adopted by those who do not hold said beliefs.¹⁶ The focus on beliefs, in terms of this dissertation, the interpretations of a sacred text, immediately reifies the divide between self and others, the one who does believe and the one who does not. An ontology of discrete subjects in conflict is forced on us, and we are frustrated by what now seems to be a necessary search for a secret calculus whereby we can “measure” beliefs against one another. But authentic reading saves us from this hopeless task, for the text is not seen as the revelation or affirmation of beliefs, a list of dogmatic assertions, but an opportunity to bring the self into question, not formulate a worldview. All discourse is human discourse, and, as Wittgenstein might say, no sacred text can claim to be its own private language, understandable only to those with the code to unlock its internal symbolism.

To see the sacred text as only a worldview to be adopted requires the reader to grant authority to the text, an authority that itself demands the reader reduce the text to digestible propositions. What is important to note here is that even the “unbelieving” but

Instead, religion depends on what is “outside” religion, but by saying so, Phillips does seem to be able to distinguish religion from other forms of life, that there is a clear division between “facts” and the religious beliefs based on those facts: “To say that the meaning of religious beliefs is partly dependent on non-religious facts is not to say that those beliefs are justified by, or could be inferred from, the facts in question” (72). See Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion*, 63, 65, 67, 69, and 72.

¹⁶Michael Hodges makes a point about beliefs, however, that problematizes the focus on beliefs as descriptions or attitudes. With regard to Christianity, Hodges argues that “Jesus *is present* in the Gospels, not merely described by them. For the believer, it is the Jesus revealed in and through the Gospels who transforms human life and with whom one can come into relation” (original italics). See Michael P. Hodges, “Faith: Themes from Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche,” in *Wittgenstein and Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Robert L. Arrington and Mark Addis (New York: Routledge, 2004). It is difficult to imagine how one can “convince” or “persuade” someone of accepting beliefs now understood in this way, which denies the propositional nature of belief or conceiving beliefs as hypotheses to be confirmed by experiment later.

still inauthentic reader regards the religious text as a putative authority on human behavior and the origins of the universe, and reads it in order to understand what “others” believe to be the truth. Even for the casual reader still given to interpretation via propositional beliefs, the religious text is never merely a text, but an entire system of belief, a complete way of life. All interpretations of a religious text, whether by “insiders” or “outsiders,” are made within this sphere of influence, as long as authentic reading is ignored and the text made invisible. If we were to follow Sartre, however, there is no real choice in choosing to give up one’s freedom by granting authority to something else; it simply cannot be done. For Sartre, one may live in bad faith, but one can never fail to choose a value, and so a reader can never claim that certain values and beliefs are necessarily imposed and must be assumed by her. Most belief-oriented readers, however, who hold to a particular text do not think they have simply chosen beliefs as the meaning of that text. Indeed, such a claim would be anathema to them and effectively de-authorize their texts. The most important claims of the belief-oriented and authority-granting reader of a sacred text is that the text cannot be wrong, contains the complete and ultimate truth, very often moral truth, and that the believer’s interpretation is no interpretation at all but simply an understanding of this truth. The believer simply “reads” the text and nothing more. But as we have seen, this is equivalent to the claim that a text interprets itself, that the reader is simply a device that either responds favorably to the text or rejects it.

The issue of beliefs in the context of sacred texts remains complex, largely because these texts do seem to have easily identifiable moral and ethical codes. There is

no need for guesswork when one is given a list of accepted behaviors or unacceptable behaviors, for example, via commandments or through a parable. I have no desire to impugn those who give authority to a text with an honest desire to live rightly and find happiness within their lives, but it is not the desire for happiness which is in question here. What is at stake is the text, the humanity of both authors and readers. To reduce a sacred text to a list of propositions, or to make ontological assumptions regarding its worth by measuring meaning according to its putative metaphoricity or literalness, is to fail to hear the discourse the text itself is. Sacred literature does not have a univocal purpose, and believing is not an unchanging and permanent state within a person; reading the text is instead a questioning, not simply accepting or rejecting the text, for questioning is itself contemplative and imaginative. A sacred text itself, regardless of values openly portrayed within it, is a record of a questioning of who the reader is, a record of the poiesis of self through an encounter with Being. To ignore this is to ignore the truth in the text and made visible by the text, it is to ignore the personhood of others and reduce them to objects whose worth must now be calculated. It is to relate text and others not to an authentic self, but to the ego-subject, to the needs of the ego-subject, thereby never realizing one's own power to dis-cover entities and reveal truth. Therefore the reader who conforms the text to a system of beliefs must also imagine that every situation supplies an identical context in which to exercise those beliefs.¹⁷ Time and history are annihilated in

¹⁷Which is what Kevin Schilbrack seems to be advocating by using Donald Davidson to support his own theory of religious beliefs: they do not "represent" reality, but the universe of religious beliefs "interpret" differently the "same" reality. See Kevin Schilbrack, "The Study of Religious Belief after Donald Davidson," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14, no. 3-4 (2002): 344.

preference for an eternal present from which the reader will never awaken to her own becoming. To bow to a perceived authority within the text is ultimately to conform to the overall structure of metaphysics, to search for a why when our authentic being is ultimately groundless, without a why, “held out into the Nothing.”¹⁸

To read authentically is to embrace this lack of a why, to fall wholeheartedly within the inexpressible, the endless call and response of the never yet finished or completed. In listening to another’s language, that which is never our own expression, we come to express ourselves, to set ourselves on the path of making. We will inevitably come to have beliefs along this path of making, but the hermeneutics of reading shows these to be our own imaginative responses in the process of our becoming, contingent and not necessary. This is the authentic sense of freedom, not as the will of a subject as it calculates the worth of objects present-at-hand, but understanding the human being as the place of dis-discovery of beings, of truth.¹⁹ Only our own misguided desire to be the fixed

¹⁸Martin Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91. Heidegger urges us to understand true hearing and responding to others is the source of wonder: “Of all beings, only the human being, called upon by the voice of being, experiences the wonder of all wonders: *that beings are...* Awe clears and cherishes that locality of the human essence within which humans remain at home in that which endures” (original italics). See Martin Heidegger, “Postscript to ‘What Is Metaphysics?’” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 234.

¹⁹Even Sartre seems to echo this Heideggerian thought at times, claiming for example that “finitude is freedom.” See *BN* 698. At 568, Sartre contends that it is in attempting to escape from our freedom that we turn to motives and causes in hopes of making them “permanent.” For him, freedom is a “nothingness” that “forces” us to “choose” ourselves and not simply be. But of course this is an ontological structure for Sartre, not the wielding of a power. He appends this interesting note to *Truth and Existence* 46: “Freedom: assuming what we haven’t created.” For Heidegger, as noted previously, freedom is not a human property but the “ground of inner possibility.” Freedom “reveals itself as letting beings be,” which is a “granting,” a “preservation.” Letting be is “engagement,” to be “in the region of unconcealment,” which is freedom, the “exposure to the disclosedness of beings,” not an “activity” or “mental state.” We are “possessed by” freedom. See Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 143-5. If letting-be is freedom, is preservation, then reading as the preserving of the work of art that is the text is the exercising of authentic freedom, becoming

center of all beings causes us to think our beliefs are timeless, causes us to transfer such awesome hubris from ourselves to the mythologized unchanging nature of a text and claim that text as the “cause” of our law-like and supposedly eternally correct beliefs. But our beliefs have no why, neither within nor outside the text, but simply are our situation of interpretation. In response to Being and beings, in response to others, we live a certain way, and if we are to discuss our conflicting interpretations as to which is “better” or more “humane,” we must start these responses, not with a putative why that ideally reveals a supposed center that holds forever. Valuation as the basis of truth and meaning implies our technological approach to Being, and the technological understanding of Being is our present form of the destruction of others, which is ultimately a destruction of self, a disavowal of freedom and a denial of truth. We are left then to conclude that the hermeneutics of reading, to read authentically, is to avoid the temptation to answer this question, “Who is the reader?” That is, we must ask the question but remain in aporia, for in that aporia we feel the need to keep searching and so become explicitly aware of our own unfolding being. To think we have a lasting or final answer to the question is disastrous, for to think so is as good as never asking the question in the first place by assuming the self to be a stable entity whose qualities can be observed and properly designated—in short, to leave the aporetic nature of the question is to arrive at a subjectivity, the self-as-object, not a person. We must avoid the temptation of the epistemological, for who we *are* is not an object of knowledge, and instead respond by exercising our humanity, that is, engaging in discourse. Such an engagement entails

“possessed” by the work, not imposing our beliefs on it.

being silent and listening, speaking and calling, imagining and wondering. It is to hold oneself in the abyss of the ineffable, anticipating another's expression in hopes of answering, and in our answering discover ourselves to be human.

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